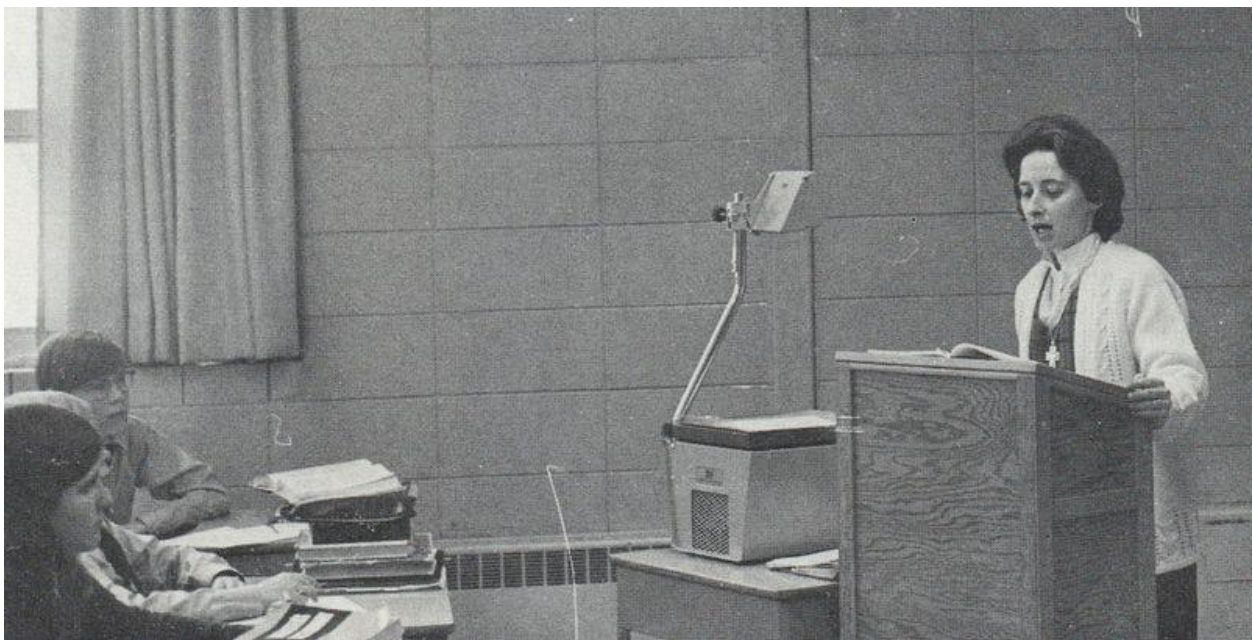


After 50 years at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Aurora, Sister Nancy Ulrich saying goodbye

By TOM STRONG AURORA BEACON-NEWS



Only occasionally do we have the good fortune to know someone who has given 60 years of her life ministering to others in a spirit of love and dedication.

But longevity by itself does not summarize the career of Sister Nancy Ulrich, a School Sister of St. Francis who has lived and ministered to generations of children and adults for 50 years at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Aurora.

Primarily because of health concerns, she will soon be moving to Sacred Heart Convent in Milwaukee. She has resided at the convent at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish since 1971, arriving to teach seventh and eighth grade Language Arts at the parish school in the fall of that year.

She had already served at three other parish schools in Illinois and Wisconsin, so her “servant career” has actually extended for a span of 60 years. Since entering the convent to finish high school, she is now marking 66 years as a part of the School Sisters.

Her ministries have far exceeded her role as “just” a Catholic school teacher, although at least two generations of kids remember her mainly as their teacher, and later principal.

Having primarily taught fourth grade, Sister Nancy transitioned to teaching older kids upon her arrival in Aurora.

“Some of the older boys were a little difficult,” she said with a smile. “But I enjoyed all the kids, and remember that I would read to them after every lunch hour. They enjoyed hearing the stories.”

She also became part of the CCD program, which was religious education for public school students. She became part of the music ministry, and was an organist at many Masses.

Although a soft spoken person, her strong leadership qualities were evident, and she became department head of the upper grades of the school. During the 1980s and 1990s, she ascended to become the assistant principal, and eventually principal of Our Lady of Good Counsel School.



Her important leadership was also evident in some very difficult and unexpected ways. Moshe Rogers, an Aurora Central Catholic student and former student of hers was killed in 1995, and Nico Contreras, a kindergarten student at the school, was killed in 1996. Both of these events badly shook the entire city of Aurora, but were especially hard at Our Lady of Good Counsel School.

Describing it as “an extremely difficult time,” she helped to guide the school and parish through the terrible tragedies.

Since retiring as principal in 1999, she has stayed active in many of the parish ministries including baptismal preparation, helping the sacristans with their duties and singing in the choir.

But not having enough on her plate, Sister Nancy joined in helping the religious education ministry at St. Irene Parish in Warrenville, her home while growing up. She commuted there from Aurora for 17 more years, and helped in other ministries such as sacramental preparation for children, and also participated in a religious sabbatical in San Antonio, Texas, during those years.

She has also served as a volunteer ESL tutor at the Dominican Literacy Center in Aurora. To say the least, her “retirement” has been anything but a traditional one.

As I visited with her, I asked for her reflections on life as part of a religious community, and also on her service in Aurora at Our Lady of Good Counsel.

“Living religious life is something very special,” she said. “It’s something we shared with one another that became part of our lives. We enjoyed it.

“I always love the kids, and maybe not having any brothers or sisters made me want to know them better, and to help them. It’s very nice when I receive a letter and someone says ‘if it hadn’t been for you, I wouldn’t have made it this far in school.’”

After serving one parish for 50 years, it is an emotional time for Sister Nancy and the “kids” and parishioners she has been a part of for so long.

“Our Lady of Good Counsel has meant very, very much to me,” she said. “I’ve become very attached to it through the people I’ve worked with. The kids of course, but just the people I have met who have touched my life.

“It has been my joy to be here for 50 years, and it’s very hard to say goodbye,” she said.

There will be a celebration for Sister Nancy Ulrich in the St. Francis Center at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church on Sunday, Aug. 29, after the 8 and 10 a.m. Masses. Everyone is welcome.

Tom Strong is a freelance reporter for The Beacon-News.