

Milestones

Teacher answers call to career and vocation

By Lanette Cypher
Guest contributor

Sister Dianne Crowley has a few years to go before celebrating her grand jubilee years — unless she were to count her previous 22 years in a teaching career.

Still, she has reason to celebrate this year. On Feb. 24, she made her profession as the newest member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester.

"It was certainly a ministry at the time," she said of her years teaching at Honeoye Central School. "It's just that there came a time I felt there was another direction I was being called to."

She is happy to continue teaching, however, and has been working at St. Monica's School on Genesee Street, with the Wegman's Early Education (WEE) Program, as well as with the H.O.P.E. Program (Holistic Orientation for Peace Education).

On one day this past winter, for example, she sat with kindergartners in a small circle.

A candle flickered in the center, and soft music played in the background.

"How does peace grow in your heart?" she asked one of the students.

"When my mother takes me to the Discovery Zone," the young boy sincerely replied.



Submitted photo
Sister Dianne Crowley is the newest member of the Sisters of St. Joseph. She made her official profession Feb. 24.

Sister Dianne smiled, then repeated the question to the other students.

Caring for brothers and sisters, using manners, and recycling were among other answers.

"I can really see how these young people are developing a sense of peace and finding that center within themselves," Sister Dianne said. "I enjoy watching them grow, not just academically, but spiritually."

Sister Dianne, too, has discovered her own sense of fulfillment and peace.

"I believe this is a viable life choice," Sister Dianne said. "Each of us may live the vows

differently in the choices that we make, but to me, the vows are about love and relationships with God and with each other."

Sister Dianne, 46, had spent most of her life in her hometown of East Bloomfield, leaving only to earn a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Keuka College. Her social activities centered on the town and St. Bridget/St. Joseph's Church there.

"I was very involved in my community and church, but I also felt a desire to deepen my spirituality and broaden my faith experiences," she said.

By coincidence, she had read about a Franciscan community

in New Jersey that worked with AIDS babies. Sister Dianne became interested in this work, so she contacted a few local agencies. She quickly learned that the Sisters of St. Joseph were establishing a new ministry with high-risk infants.

She attended a meeting at the motherhouse in Pittsford about the AIDS mission. Again by coincidence, the meeting also served as a re-introduction to the SSJs.

Sister Dianne had attended St. Mary's School, Canandaigua, and St. Agnes High School, Rochester, both staffed by the SSJs.

"Little by little, I was drawn into looking more closely at this life," Sister Dianne explained.

The fact that she was in her mid-40s with an established career as an elementary school teacher did not discourage her.

"It seemed strange to some of my family and friends to be looking at such a change at this time in my life," Sister Dianne said. "Yet there was something inside me that said really look at it."

Her recent profession of vows was a special occasion for the order, especially since fewer women have entered the sisterhood through the years.

"We are very happy that Dianne has chosen to join us," Sister Rosemary St. Peter, the congregational president, said. "Can you imagine the risk and

the faith that are necessary to make a commitment like this in this day? Women who become sisters today give up so much: a career, a life of independence, control over their personal decisions about lifestyle and working situations. They have to learn how to live as part of a community and share their talents in ministry.

"Dianne has many gifts and wants to use them in the service of others," she continued. "This kind of generosity gives me hope for the future."

Sister Dianne shares this hope for the future.

"I am the same person except I have a title of 'Sister' in front of my name," Sister Dianne said. "That title gives me no special privileges with God. It makes me no less human or holier than anyone else. I'm afraid I still have all my quirks and flaws. I have found, however, that being a sister means I have made a life choice that has helped me to grow and experience a fuller sense of relationship with God and people in the living and sharing of community, resources and ministry.

"It is, like marriage, in that it is a commitment to love and as the title of the song from 'Aspects of Love' by Andrew Lloyd Weber says, 'Love Changes Everything,' and it certainly has for me."

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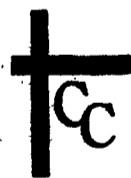
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