

Reflections for Sister Ann Fasbender by S. Jeanne Ranek [Rdg: Isaiah 40: 1-6a, 9-11]

"A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?'...'Here is your God!'...he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom...." As we entrust Sister Ann into the arms of the one she served faithfully, we remember the things she treasured and the gifts she shared.

Family was important to Sister Ann; she and her sisters, Sisters Bennett and Veronica, often reminisced on childhood memories, reflecting a happy family of loving parents and five children. Born in 1930 near Hendricks, MN, Ann was a middle child, the third of four girls. Her only brother, James, was youngest. The parish church at White, SD, was an important part of family life.

Baptized Gertrude Ann, she was given the name Imogene as a novice and became known as Ann when we were allowed reclaim our baptismal names in the 1960s.

Ann received her early education in a small country school. Her high school years at Good Counsel Academy in Mankato and Mount Marty High School were formative and influential in her choice of religious life and her call to our Benedictine community.

Ann served faithfully in a variety of ministries during her active years. In the fall of 1950, she set out on an elementary teaching career—serving in Yankton, Ipswich, Aberdeen, and Sioux Falls. In 1963 she assumed responsibilities as principal in Vermillion and later in Omaha before returning to classroom teaching in Sioux Falls at Christ the King, a place she loved.

Whether working in the kitchen, teaching, being a listening presence or running a center, Ann found meaning in her work and bonded with superiors and co-workers. Among the special friends she mentions by name in her reflections are Ss. Henrietta, Martina, Ernestine and Faith—all of whom surely welcomed Ann in eternity.

Over the years Ann had earned her bachelor degree from Mount Marty College and a Masters in history from the University of South Dakota. In 1973 studied in the Religious Education Graduate Program at Mundelein College in Chicago.

Ann's *favorite* ministry began in 1974 when she became supervisor of the Mount Marty Day Care Center caring daily for children from 6 months to 6 years, "an age group" she wrote, "that I had always wanted to work with." As a child when asked what she wanted to do when she grew up; she had responded, "I'd like to run an orphanage."

She writes, "Day care was new at that time. That was a blessings for me. The government hadn't discovered that there were such things, so they had not made a lot of laws in order to get a thumb on everything." She loved to protect the freedom of little children to be children, so she never tried to turn day care into pre-school.

"There is plenty of time for that later," she writes.

It was inspiring to walk through the Day Care Center and observe Ann's motherly touch for each child. I'm sure the doll she cuddled in her last years must have taken her back to that rewarding ministry to which she devoted more than 20 years.

After a long day with her little charges, Ann would often choose to skip recreation with our Shalom group and retire early. However, we noticed that on those evenings that offered either a charismatic prayer meeting or an event with her beloved Native Americans, Ann would seem to experience a mysterious surge of energy that kept her going for a few more hours.

Ann loved the outdoors, whether camping with Ss. Veronica and Bennett on their annual summer vacations or enjoying a wheelchair stroll down the sorrowful way with Sister Jill.

Prayer was important to Ann, and she treasured silence. Ann was not a very talkative person, but she said a lot with her eyes. One could notice the twinkle in her eye at the antics of little children and her quiet amusement at the ridiculous in life. Fr. Andrew describes her as having "Advent eyes," and he poses a question for all of us: "Do our eyes gaze upon the Christ that Sister Ann gazed upon when she saw what we see?"

Church renewal during Vatican II was also a time of *personal renewal* for Ann. She states, "I had no problem accepting any of the changes [in Church and community renewal]." "I found it very, very good." While in Vermillion, she reports the invigorating impact of a visit by Father (later Bishop) Anderson who she comments was "all fired up about the changes."

About praying the office in Latin prior to the changes Ann comments: "I knew that GOD understood it, but I knew that *I* didn't."

Among the highlights of her life, Ann recalls a trip to the Holy Land and a 30-day solitude retreat at Guelph, Ontario.

Her Native American ministries began casually and seemed to grow like Topsy. The ministries she provided among these beloved people primarily in Yankton and later in Trenton, ND, make a long list, but she always felt that her principal gift was to be a *listening presence*. She adopted a motto from Mother Teresa, "We are called upon not to be successful but to be faithful." Tonight's Scripture reading is fitting, "Comfort, give comfort to my people, says our God." That is what Sister Ann spent her life doing.

In her later years, Ann's gift of simplicity and silence continued as dementia set in. But she never lost her radiant smile, and gifted her ever-faithful buddy, Sister Jill, with one of her priceless smiles just days before her death.

Sister Ann, we will miss your gentle presence among us and your radiant smile. *May you be comforted and rejoice always in the Presence of the one you loved and served in this life.*