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2020: Kathleen Rossman, O.S.F.

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During Women's History Month, the University of Dayton Women's Center coordinates, as an experiential learning opportunity for students, an annual exhibit highlighting the contributions women have made at the University of Dayton.

Theme for 2020: Voices of Courage

2020: Kathleen Rossman, O.S.F.

Written by Mary Niebler, Coordinator of Cross-Cultural Immersions, Center for Social Concern

Generosity and hospitality seem to be the virtues that have carried through Kathleen Rossman's life, principles of which she has exemplified throughout her many endeavors.

Kathleen was born in Norwalk, OH, one of two children. She and her brother were close, both in age and as siblings. Her father, an entrepreneur, ran a tavern in Lima, OH and eventually the family owned and ran a motel in Galion. Showing kindness and welcome to others, oftentimes strangers, seemed innate in this upbringing.

Prayer played a strong role in Kathleen's life, starting at a young age. In fact, her father would at times find that she had fallen asleep on her knees at her bedside saying her nighttime prayers. It was in high school in Mansfield where Kathleen met the Joliet Franciscan Sisters, the order she joined at the age of 19. She was drawn to the Franciscan charism with a love for nature and hospitality. Her Catholic faith was always a central part of her life, and the vowed religious life fulfilled her desire to be a part of something bigger.

She attended the College of St Francis (now the University of St Francis), in Joliet, IL, earning a BA in Sociology, an MS in Counseling Psychology, and a Certificate in Spiritual Direction. She spent 5 years as a grade school math teacher before becoming the vocation director for her community. During the transition in the Church brought about by Vatican II, there was a renewed sense of the role of women and the laity in the church, which brought certain joys and challenges to this position. Eventually, Kathleen was asked work in Campus Ministry at the College of St Francis. Upon the invitation, the provost of the college asked her to be a "Christian in residence," which Kathleen grew to describe as a person of presence. Eventually, she was Director of Campus Ministry there.



Kathleen takes being present to those around her very seriously, and believes that every person she comes in contact with could be Jesus. This is evident in her attentive nature and kind approach to all interpersonal encounters.

Kathleen went on to work for four years as a Residence Hall Campus Minister at the University of Notre Dame before being appointed to two four-year terms in leadership for the Joliet Franciscans. After that, she found herself looking for a job and discovered an opening in Campus Ministry at the University of Dayton. Here, her presence was a guidance for 30 years from August of 1989 until her retirement in August of 2019.

Kathleen served as the Campus Minister in Marycrest, then in VWK and the Garden Apartments. She ran faith sharing groups, and found great energy in providing small, safe places for students to feel heard and supported. Kathleen was instrumental in leading groups such as Living with Loss, working with students who had experienced the death of someone close to them, and BGLAD (eventually Spectrum), serving as an ally and advocate for the LGBTQ+ community on campus.

She felt her Franciscan spirituality guided her in working with the vulnerable and misunderstood. Anyone who has had a one on one conversation with Kathleen knows she is curious and truly listens to what you have to say. Her presence is one of calm and comfort, recognizing everyone's humanity, without judgement. Kathleen found great joy in connecting with colleagues through Campus Ministry team endeavors such as the Morale Committee and planning for the annual Lenten Fish Fry event.

In her retirement, Kathleen finds more time to connect with family and friends. Her brother, four nieces and nephews, and 12 great nieces and nephews are a big part of her life. She finds ways to continue to provide hospitality for others and to be a ministry of presence wherever she is. She enjoys baking, especially her famous chocolate cake, and listening to the spirit for what is next.