

My life as a sister and Justice Team member

Sue Gallagher, RSM; Institute Justice Team

Many times, we have thought – and I have felt – the words of Frances Ward, our American founder: “It is a glorious thing to be a Sister of Mercy.” Now and then, we may add a phrase or a descriptor; as I write this reflection, completing this thought seems important – “It is a glorious thing to be a Sister of Mercy... and a member of the Institute Justice Team!” Even though I am celebrating my sixty-third Mercy Day and will be eighty years old on my next birthday, mercy and justice keep me enthusiastic and energized – most days.

As I ponder a day in my life, I'd like to share a compilation of the kinds of activities and experiences – as well as the people – I engage. No one day captures them all!

Being a sister adds an extra layer of joy and ministry. As a member of our schola here in Merion, Pennsylvania, I enjoy singing for holy days and holidays. And as a member of the funeral committee, I am honored to be involved in planning, preparing, and orchestrating services (funeral liturgy and prayers of remembrance). For the past few years, I have served as a community facilitator in Mercy Volunteer Corps. I am always impressed with the people who participate and their growing dedication to Mercy through their ministries.

There are so many opportunities to join our sisters, associates, and colleagues in prayer and development of the Critical Concerns, often adding a bit of humor.

In the morning I enjoy spending time in contemplative sitting and meditation. As I like to say, “Can’t leave home without it!” I try to keep abreast of the news and at the same time to be choiceful about the news I consume. A conscious dose of the news is a must. My top news sources are: Democracy Now with Amy Goodwin, Sky News from the UK for another perspective, and NPR News at times. I also count on podcasts like *Inside the Vatican* (America Media); *On the Media*; *The Daily* (NYTimes); and *Witness History* (BBC News). I find I can only tap into some of these sources each day to protect my mind and heart. I wait to work with emails until after 9:30 a.m.; otherwise, they consume my day. If I see a sister’s name or an Institute or Justice Team member, these come first.

Although I learned I could work from home during our COVID time, I enjoy working in my office in the administrative area of Merion. My colleagues and the sisters in our retirement area help keep me grounded. At times, people will visit my office, often with suggestions or questions. Folks also call me on the phone: “Sue do you have a prayer service for (a particular area)? Or “What are we doing for (a particular area)?” It’s a

chance for me to connect with people and to extend myself to a particular area. Also, there are times I am involved in planning events like our upcoming postcard writing campaign. Frequently, I deliver presentations: *Dilexi te* for the sisters at Watchung, NJ; advocacy for college students; natural burial for the community. I enjoy giving presentations which taps into my life as a teacher.

Attending webinars is a favorite activity, especially if they are worthwhile to critical interests. Organizations like Nuns Against Gun Violence, LCWR, and NETWORK all offer helpful programs and materials. Participation in a variety of Zoom discussions takes time and is usually time well spent. I attend a Faithful Philly discussion group frequently. Last week it was a delight to see so many of my Zoomer friends at a conference sponsored by the Cabrini Center for Immigration at Villanova. Getting to know people involved in peace and justice work is always helpful.

I value the work in my office; however, my happy place is on the road. Whenever I can visit sisters in other areas, I am delighted. I want to do this more frequently. It is so important to hear how Mercy is being spread throughout this region by our sisters and friends. Justice seems to be taken very seriously!

In my ministry of justice, I've been able to travel to El Paso, Texas and the border with Juárez in Chihuahua, Mexico. I met so many people who taught me the root causes of immigration, and I got to meet wonderful people like Sisters Kathleen Erickson and Betty Campbell (R.I.P.). These wonderful sisters have given their lives for [siblings]. I've also traveled to El Salvador with SHARE (Salvadoran Humanitarian Aid, Research, and Education Foundation) and my colleague, Jean Stokan, and celebrated the Church women martyred there: Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, and lay missionary Jean Donovan, as well as Saint Oscar Romero. We then traveled to Honduras, meeting amazing folks including Hermana Masbely Del Cid, RSM and Associate Nelly Del Cid. These are life-changing experiences.

There are many organizations to learn from, as you know. Some of my favorites are: Back from the Brink (a U.S.-based grassroots coalition of individuals, organizations, and elected officials working together toward a world free of nuclear weapons), Franciscan Peace Center, Pace e Bene, Pax Christi, and the Social Justice Resource Center. They are filled with resources that inform my work and transform society.

Providing Zoom presence for our Nonviolence Interest Group meeting once a month for the past 3 years is a source of enrichment for me. I know many other groups have joined together in prayer and sharing to nurture further nonviolence in our lives and in our world.

This facilitation started as a work for justice, and it has expanded into an integral aspect of my life and ministry.

It would be impossible to keep pushing toward our goals as a community and as a team member without the wonderful colleagues on the Justice Team. We assist each other in our openness and care for justice and each other. Meeting every Wednesday for 90 minutes is just the beginning of our work together. As Catherine said, "The tender Mercy of God has given us one another!"