

Sister Ruth Mattingly found her place with the Ursuline Sisters

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While looking for a job after graduating from high school, Ursuline Sister Ruth Mattingly felt something lacking.

“I had this feeling that ‘I don’t care if I get this job or not.’ I knew this wasn’t it,” she said. A year after she graduated, in May 1955, she was working in a department store in Springfield, Ky., when her brother came home and told her that Ursuline Sister Joseph Marian Logsdon, Sister Ruth’s favorite teacher in high school, was visiting nearby Fredericktown, and volunteered to drive her over to visit.

“Out of the blue she said, ‘Have you thought anymore about entering the convent?’ We hadn’t talked about it,” Sister Ruth said. “I went home that day and told my mom that I was entering the convent that September.”



Sister Ruth is seen here in her room at Saint Joseph Villa in June doing one of her favorite activities, needlework.



Sister Ruth in the 1960s.

Sister Ruth has now been an Ursuline Sister for 57 years, a decision she feels blessed to have made. “I’m happy I became a sister. It worked out right.”

She was born in Marion County, Ky., but grew up in neighboring Fredericktown, better known by its nickname, “the Burg.” “When I was in the second grade, we bought the farm my mom grew up on in Fredericktown,” she said. It was in the second grade that she met the Ursuline Sisters, who taught at the public Fredericktown School, first grade through high school.

All her teachers were Ursulines, but the ones who made the biggest impression were Sister Janette Bowling, who taught her seventh and eighth grades, and Sister Joseph Marian, who taught her in high school.

“They stood out as remarkable people,” she said. “They treated everybody in their class the same. You were just as important as the next person.” Sister Janette had a lot of fun with people and was a very good teacher, Sister Ruth said.

“Sister Janette was the first sister to cause me to think about becoming an Ursuline in the seventh grade,” she said. “I wrote to her to ask what it was like for her.”

Sister Joseph Marian also enjoyed having fun with the students. “She chose me to be the Blessed Mother in the Christmas play,” Sister Ruth said. “That was very special.”

As a postulant, Sister Ruth began her friendship with a novice that has lasted 58 years, Sister Catherine Marie Lauterwasser.

“We worked together in the dining room,” Sister Catherine Marie said. “I had just taken the veil and the director of novices told me she would get me some help. She gave me Sister Ruth, she was the good help.”



Sister Ruth, left, was a postulant and is joined by her new friend, Sister Catherine Marie Lauterwasser at the Motherhouse in 1956. The two remain good friends today.

The two became good friends in the two years they worked together on various assignments. They went to separate missions, but Sister Ruth made a point to always write and keep the friendship going.



Sister Ruth, left, and Sister Catherine Marie stood outside of Saint Ursula Hall to pose for a new picture on June 25, 2013.

“She’s very loyal,” Sister Catherine Marie said. “When we’re together, it’s like we’ve never been apart.” Sister Catherine Marie is now the treasurer at the Motherhouse, so the two can see each other often. “She’s prayerful and works hard,” Sister Catherine Marie said. “She’s community minded and always thinks of others.”

When Sister Ruth became a novice, she took the name Sister Walter Ann, after her mother and one of her brothers. She wanted to be George for her father, but it was taken. She returned to her baptismal name following Vatican II.

“When I first entered, I wanted to teach religion,” she said. Her first mission was at St. Bartholomew in the Louisville suburbs, where she began with first grade and eventually moved to third.

“I was scared to death,” she said. “I saw the faces of the first-graders and I thought, ‘Oh my, you’re scared too. I better not be scared.’”

After eight years in Louisville, she taught for a year in Glennonville, Mo., then five years in Hawesville, Ky. In 1972, she returned to Louisville to teach fourth grade at St. Denis for the next 12 years.

“In Louisville I could call and see my family,” she said. “Glennonville was way out in the country.”

Her principal at St. Denis the first six years was Sister Mary Matthias Ward. “She made you feel that she trusted you to do what you were supposed to do,” Sister Ruth said. “She was very fair with all the teachers.”



Sister Mary Matthias is now the local community life coordinator at the Motherhouse, and said Sister Ruth was a wonderful support to her as principal. “She would do anything for anybody,” Sister Mary Matthias said.

Sister Mary Matthias meets with Sister Ruth individually 32 weeks of the year for prayer. “She’s very interested in deepening her relationship with the Lord,” Sister Mary Matthias said. “She’ll do the switchboard anytime I ask her. She still has a lot of energy to be of service to others.”



Sister Ruth poses with Joyce Alexander, a nurse in Saint Joseph Villa who recently retired. The two were celebrating “A Day at the Beach” on May 14.

During the summers, the sisters who taught school came home to the Mount and got three weeks of relaxation and retreat, and the other three weeks they worked at the Motherhouse, Sister Ruth said. Her summer job was in pastoral care in the infirmary, and because she did a good job there, she was asked to come to the Mount for that ministry full time in 1984.

“I felt like this was what the community wanted me to do,” Sister Ruth said. Her tasks were similar to what nurse’s aides do now, giving the sisters baths and helping to dress and feed them. “I

liked doing it, being able to take care of our sisters. You have to have a little calling to do it, it’s not easy.”

Sister Ruth has lived in Saint Joseph Villa since 2005, and her experience working in pastoral care gives her a unique perspective on today’s staff. “I appreciate the work they do for us,” she said.

After seven years in the infirmary, she returned to teaching at St. Joseph School in San Fidel, N.M. “I had heard so much about New Mexico, I’m glad I got to see what I did,” she said. After two years, she knew it was time to leave there, and she came back to the Mount to be coordinator of the Guest House for three years.

“I enjoyed it, I met a lot of people that way,” she said. “We still had the music camp in the summer and many of them stayed in the Guest House.”

In 1996, she began the ministry she calls her “love and joy,” parish minister at St. Joseph Parish in Leitchfield, Ky. “I visited the sick in the hospital, nursing homes and homebound, and did some sacristan work,” she said. “One of the best things I got to do was take the sacrament of Holy Eucharist to the sick. It was such a great privilege to do.”

The people of the parish were so friendly, Sister Ruth still thinks of them often. “I just love those people,” she said. “I had cancer surgery while I was there. I had to have 35 radiation treatments, and people took turns bringing me to Owensboro (an hour away) for treatment, and then we’d go out to eat. They were wonderful.”

By 2005, Sister Ruth was having such trouble with her balance that she knew it was time to come home to the Mount. Since her return, she takes her turn on the switchboard and up until recently, helped at the nurse’s station in Saint Joseph Villa.

She enjoys the time to pray at the Mount, and she takes advantage of the many activities for the sisters, including exercise time. She spends her free time working on embroidery, cross stitch and straight stitch, and other craft projects.



Sister Ruth is joined by Associate Carol Hill on April 27, 2013, the night of the Elvis dinner at the Mount. Hill is from Grayson County, where Sister Ruth ministered from 1996-2005.

By Dan Heckel