

# Empathy matters

After  
WORDS



Sister Mary Ellen Rufft

Although the articles in every issue of this newsletter are of varying topics, they are all, in truth, about how we strive to keep God's Providence alive in our world. We take seriously Jesus' commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." It becomes clear as we read about people in this and other issues of Providence Alive, that in order to love in the way that Jesus encouraged, we must cultivate the gift of empathy. To be empathetic is to be so emotionally attuned to the other person's feelings that we actually feel with them.

Since it seems more instinctive for human beings to respond out of our own context rather than entering the world of the other person, empathy does not always come naturally nor easily. In Jesus' commandment, however, we are reminded that empathy or compassion is the root of all loving.

Living examples of empathy and its profound effects abound in every issue of Providence Alive. In Sister Michele's current article about her life with foster children, she clearly illustrates how one can learn to be empathetic even with those who have very different backgrounds from one's own. In the conversation with one of her former foster daughters, it's clear that she is now sharing with her own very diverse family the empathy and love that she received while in foster care. Her final comment about her family, "we choose to love," affirms the positive continuing effects of being the recipient of empathy and compassion.

While it is difficult to imagine all the effort it takes to be empathetic with foster children of various backgrounds, different races, etc., it is almost unimaginable to consider doing so with homeless, young boys living on the streets. Yet Sister Wendolyn does just that with her "Me,Too" program in Santo Domingo. Her entering into their world with empathetic listening and caring has significantly changed the lives of many poor, hurting boys into capable, hopeful young men.

It is likely that every Sister and Associate, as well as you, our friends and supporters, have had many experiences of attempting to be empathetic with someone in need and sometimes that person was appreciative of our care and other times our attempt failed. So, I'm including here a few guidelines that past failures have led me to develop for myself, with the hope that they might be helpful for you in your attempts to be empathetic.

## Guides to Empathy

- Walk in the other's shoes before responding.
- Resist the desire to tell others that we know exactly how they feel.
- Refrain from suggesting that others should not feel as they do.
- Remember that most people want empathy more than advice.
- Do not share our own similar experience of suffering with someone in pain until after the initial impact of their trauma is over.
- May we all together continue to learn to love our neighbor as ourselves through our empathy and compassion to everyone in need.

# Save the DATE

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**2019 GALA: FROM ALPHA WITH LOVE Benefits Providence Heights Alpha School**

**Rivers Casino | Pittsburgh, PA**

November 9, 2019 | 412.366.4455 for more info

**Mission Statement:** We, the Congregation of Divine Providence, impelled by the Spirit of Jesus, commit ourselves to co-create a world of compassion, justice and peace. Guided by the legacy of Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler and Marie de la Roche, we nurture in ourselves and in others a trust and confidence in God's faithful presence. We further commit ourselves to making God's Providence more visible in our world.

*Alive!* is published by the Mission Advancement office of the Sisters of Divine Providence. We welcome your feedback at 412.635.5428. To schedule a tour of Providence Heights in Allison Park, PA, contact [missionadvancement@cdpsisters.org](mailto:missionadvancement@cdpsisters.org).



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SPRING/SUMMER 2019



A NEWSLETTER OF THE SISTERS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE  
Marie de la Roche Province

## Choose to love

Providence  
ON THE PERIPHERY



Sister Michele Bisbey  
Provincial Director

I write this sitting at the bedside of my 94-year-old dad. As always, in the background is his beloved big band music. His hands and feet keep perfect time to the familiar beat. I brought him Eucharist this morning. While most of what he says is jumbled and lacking clarity, he prayed the Our Father with outmost devotion and precise attention to each word. This time with him has made me keenly aware of how blessed I am and of the charmed life I've enjoyed in my white, Irish-Catholic family of origin. I was sheltered and secure in that homogeneous world well into adulthood. While I am immensely grateful for the blessings of my privileged upbringing, I am ever more grateful for the blessings that have unexpectedly come through the ministry of foster care.

Foster care brought the street into my convent living room. The stark realities of poverty, abuse, violence, homelessness, mental illness and physical disabilities are no longer objects of study. They are the names and faces of children who have widened and diversified my family circle. My foster children have certainly changed my understanding of family, but also of God, community and my outlook on our current world situation. I once was so secure. Now, I am often fearful for the future of my children in a world that seems ever more racist and discriminatory, where people are pitted against one another because they are different, creating a culture of paranoia. Because the issues that I once knew merely as ideological have become so very personal, I feel an urgency to make the world more compassionate.

The story of a recent conversation with my former foster daughter, now a grown woman with children of her own, is one that nurtures and renews my hope. I am gratified by the simplicity of her wisdom: "You have no need to fear for our future. You should be filled with confidence and hope. We've got this. When I talk to my kids about family, I am quick to remind them that their family circle includes those who have become my brothers and sisters through the bonds forged by our foster parents. Our family includes those who are differently abled and of various skin colors, ethnicities, economic backgrounds and religious traditions. We don't always get along, but we've learned to forgive and to reach out a helping hand. We choose to love."

Our thanks to you—our family, our friends, our partners in mission. You widen our circle by your own choice to reach out, by your choice to love.



*I am a person, too.  
I am important, too.  
I have rights, too.  
I have to love and to respect others, too.*

These affirmations are the crux of “Me, Too,” a program in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, that provides safe shelter and a chance at a better life for 7- to 17-year-old boys who are living on the streets. Most of the boys who come to “Me, Too” are from Haiti and have had long, difficult journeys. For many of them, the only way they know how to survive is to fight, having experienced homelessness, poverty, violence and abuse.

Sister Wendolyn Lopez Santos, CDP ministers with the program. With flexibility, patience and understanding, she works to empower the boys to change their behavior so they have a chance to reunite with their families and reintegrate into society. The work is hard and there is much to do. She encourages and supports participation in school, provides one-on-one tutoring and counseling and offers activities designed to build self-confidence and personal dignity. The boys are free to come and go at the shelter; it is not a jail. New arrivals may join the program at any time.

Sister Wendolyn recalls the story of one boy, in particular, who arrived at “Me, Too” when he was very young. “His behavior was violent and he frequently left the shelter to re-join his

life of living on the streets. Over time, with encouragement and attention, he attended school regularly, remained diligent with his studies and embraced the importance of his personal well-being and future. His story has come full circle. Today, he is a professional young man who now volunteers with the program,” she says.

“Sometimes we think little things do not make a difference or have an impact on someone’s life,” Sister Wendolyn says. “One memory continues to inspire me. Years ago, there was a boy who came to the shelter on the same day as my birthday. There was a birthday cake for me; it was the first one the boy ever tasted! To this day, every time the boy sees me he reminds me that the day he arrived at the shelter was my birthday. I did not realize how sharing a birthday cake would have such an impact.”

There are hundreds of children who roam the streets of Santo Domingo, surviving the day at hand, living on the margins with no real homes and little access to education. Through Sister Wendolyn’s efforts and the “Me, Too” program, the poorest and most vulnerable children have a chance. And for some, a chance is all they can hope for.

*Above: Sr. Wendolyn and boys participating in the “Me, Too” program.*

**In the tradition of the Catholic Church, the word Jubilee designates a milestone anniversary of religious life. Congratulations to all 33 of our 2019 Jubilarians who celebrate 2,225 combined years of ministry to God’s people. To read more about these Sisters, visit [cdpsisters.org/jubilarians/2019](http://cdpsisters.org/jubilarians/2019).**



**Sister Danella Hyland | 75 Years**

Sister Danella ministered to special needs students at Cardinal Cushing School in Hanover, MA (1990–2002). She also cooked at Sacred Heart High School in Kingston, MA, and served as “Dorm Mother” to resident students. She is now in prayer and general service ministry at Providence House in Kingston, MA.



**Sister Dorothy Kiel | 75 Years**

Sister Dorothy ministered in education, teaching math at Mount Providence Boys School in Normandy, MO (1971–79) and serving there as principal (1979–86). She also taught and served as principal at St. John Lateran School in Imperial, MO (1965–71), Ascension School in Normandy, MO (1952–57; 63–65), North American Martyrs School in Florissant, MO (1961–63), St. Andrews School in Tipton, MO (1947–52), St. Mary’s School in Brussels, IL (1986–91) and Brussels Community High School in Brussels, IL (1991–2001). She also taught at Divine Providence School in Westchester, IL (1958–61) and at St. Mary’s School in Madison, IL (1957–58). Sister Dorothy served as provincial council member for the Community (1975–80) and was director of education for the Sisters of Divine Providence (1975–84). She is now in prayer ministry at St. Clare’s Villa in Alton, IL.



**Sister Rose Marie Lipke | 75 Years**

Sister Rose Marie’s ministered at Sacred Heart School in Kingston, MA (1957–58; 61–63; 67–71), St. Cecilia’s School in Stamford, CT (1958–59; 63–67; 71–77) and St. Joan of Arc School in Fall River, MA (1959–61). She was director of religious education at St. Paul’s in Hingham, MA (1977–84) and St. Zephenan parish in Wayland, MA (1984–85). She was pastoral associate at Sacred Heart parish in Knoxville, TN (1985–87), St. Eulalia Parish in Boston (1987–2001) and Holy Family parish in Concord, MA. She was also a part-time chaplain at Winchester Hospital in Boston (2001–02). In the Community, Sister Rose Marie was the house administrator for the Generalate in Bridgeport, CT (2002–03). She is now in eucharistic and general service ministry at Providence House in Kingston, MA.



**Sister Mary Catherine Roth | 75 Years**

Sister Mary Catherine ministered as a licensed medical technologist in Puerto Rico. She also served as the accounts payable coordinator and treasurer for the Community from 1997 to 2011. She is now in prayer and general service ministry at Providence Heights in Pittsburgh.



**Sister Monika Mrosek | 50 Years**

Sister Monika ministered as the kindergarten director at St. Bonifatius in the Emmanuel von Ketteler Province in Germany (1972-93); special pedagogic with children at Kinderheim Oberursel; and for 10 years as a teacher at the congregation’s sponsored ministry, Ketteler-La Roche-Schule. From 1993-2007, she ministered at Ascensión del Señor parish in Las Cañitas, Santo Domingo, sharing life with the people and God’s Kingdom with the poor. For 12 of those years, she was also the director of the parish school, Hogar Pituca Flores. From 2008-2016, Sister Monika served two terms as a general councillor for the international congregation. Currently, she is in the mountains of Peru doing pastoral work, community work and teaching at a primary school.



La Roche College is proud to announce that the Pennsylvania Department of Education approved its application to become La Roche University, effective March 26, 2019. “Changing our designation and name to La Roche

University is the fulfillment of a vision that many on campus have shared for several years. This approval to become a university is recognition of how far La Roche has come. What began as a school for religious women in 1963 with seven students in its first graduating class is now a university that offers 66 undergraduate programs of study, six master’s degrees and one doctoral degree. Our 14,000 plus alumni live in every state in the U.S. and in 65 countries around the world,” President Sister Candace Introcaso, CDP, Ph.D., said.

*La Roche University is a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Divine Providence.*

World Youth Day—an international event focused on an encounter of faith with Pope Francis and youth—was celebrated January 22-27, 2019, in Panama City, Panama. Sister Elsa Medina, CDP participated as part of the Diocese of Arecibo’s delegation, which included 23 youth. On World Day for Consecrated Life, which is celebrated on February 2, the diocese sent this message: “We congratulate our pilgrim, Sister Elsa! Thanks to the Sisters of Divine Providence for supporting her participation with us in World Youth Day.” In addition, Sister Elsa was recognized as a Distinguished Citizen in Arecibo on May 5, 2019.

*Top: Sr. Elsa, right, at World Youth Day in Panama City, Panama. Bottom: Sr. Elsa’s Distinguished Citizen award.*

