



Sister Sharon Frederick has been blessing motorcycles and their owners for over ten years. She loves wearing her helmet.

Meet My Ministry - Sr. Sharon Frederick

Robert Frost wrote in his poem, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep..." And so, in 1994, at the age of 50, I re-entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate after a 30 year hiatus. I originally left the Congregation because of sickly parents, and as an only child, my help was needed. Thirty years passed and what surely was a life well lived, I made the decision to return. I sold my new home, packed up my belongings, gave up my career, moved to a new city, and began living the life that my soul and heart never forgot -- "miles to go." Now, as I approach my 25th year of living as a Joliet Franciscan, my thoughts on ministry, and how I have lived the promises that I made to God, to my Congregation, and to myself, keep resurfacing.

For 50 years, I had a fulfilling life working in both the corporate and educational sector of society. I called the University of St. Francis "home" for over 15 years, working first in the Admission Office then as Director of University Ministry. During that time, I was also the

Director of Associates for the Congregation, a 15-year ministry that truly became my passion. As a former Associate, I could readily relate to the men and women who wanted to share the mission, spirituality and vision of our Sisters, while living the lifestyle that God called them to embrace. I saw the love the Associates showed to our Sisters and to one another. I witnessed the excitement and fervor they displayed in everything they did on behalf of the Congregation. It certainly was a privilege for me to walk with so many wonderful individuals. After I retired from my University ministry, I then became a Coordinator for the Sisters living at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, a position that brought much meaning to my life.

I am a very enthusiastic and extroverted individual. I often get excited and carried away with things that are meaningful to me, a project, an idea, or a cause. I remember standing on the corner of Larkin and Jefferson in Joliet, banging on a drum, protesting with others who wanted an end to violence and terrorism in our world. Silly to some, meaningful to others, a passion

for me. I also remember taking University students to Fort Benning in Georgia to march and protest in the hopes of closing the School of the Americas, renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). I was among thousands of participants and I remember that I cried because it was so hard to listen to the speakers talk about the atrocities brought on by humanity. I also remember, Sunday after Sunday, feeding the hungry and the addicted who lived underneath Wacker Drive in downtown Chicago. A somewhat dangerous mission at times, but people needed to be fed and I knew God was watching over my friends and me. The parish soup kitchen where I volunteered is still open these 30 years later. There will always be hungry people and I still ask myself, “why” in a country as rich as ours, why do people still go hungry?



Sister Sharon takes her time visiting with each motorcyclist. Some even ask her to bless their personal medals and rosaries.

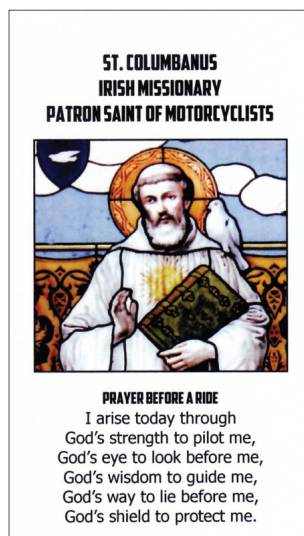
As I find myself in my so-called, “retirement years,” I still have that desire and zeal to travel the “miles” that God has called me. Before I retired from my full-time ministry, the question that remained foremost in my mind was, “What could I now do to make life better for others?” Could I, in some small way, be a presence to and for others? Would my health allow it and would I have the energy? I knew that if I came to that realization I would also have the peace and joy I was seeking.

One of the answers came while I was on the back-end of a motorcycle. My cousin and her husband own a Harley Davidson dealership in Indiana. Through my interactions with motorcycle owners and individuals patronizing the store, I have met all kinds of people from all walks of life – professionals, blue and white collar workers, and those that just want to ride against the wind. As I was holding on tight to my cousin, she asked if I wanted to participate in the “Blessing of the Motorcycles.” I didn’t need to think but a second and quickly answered, “Yes, of course.” That was ten years ago and I still look forward to this event each year.

The Blessing of the Motorcycles occurs during the spring. Bikers from all over northern Indiana rev up their motorcycles and ride to St. John, Indiana, where the Millennium Statue of Mary and the Shrine of Christ’s Passion is located. I consider this site, “holy ground.” This year nearly 100 riders came together for the bike blessing. To keep us safe as we traveled on the highway from Munster, Indiana, to St. John,

several police patrol cars blocked all the major intersections so that the motorcade could pass uninterrupted. It was quite an impressive sight! Once we arrived at our destination, I gave a short prayer and reflection. Then the bikers began lining up for their blessing. I always bring holy water to dip my fingers as I make the sign of the cross on the foreheads of each individual. I say a prayer and I ask God to keep the riders and their passengers safe from harm as they travel the highways and byways. Some bikers even bring their own rosaries and medals to be blessed. This year we gave each biker a holy card with a prayer and photo of St. Columbanus, the Patron Saint of motorcyclists. Often bikers will come up to me to tell me of their family situation and

hardships or how they were in an accident but survived. They believe it is because of the blessing they received that no harm has come to them. Needless to say, it has been an honor and a gift for me to serve my family and the motorcyclists in this unique ministry. They are part of the fabric of my life. My only disappointment is that I wish I could drive a motorcycle but unfortunately or perhaps, fortunately, I have already flunked the test twice!





Sister Sharon loves escorting pets at the hospital. "It really makes patients happy!"

I also volunteer at Silver Cross Hospital in New Lenox, Illinois, as an escort in the Pet Therapy Department. This too is part of the fabric of my life. While there are 700 volunteers at the hospital, there are also 20 dogs who are specially trained to bring comfort and joy to the patients. The training for both the owner and the dog takes nearly a year. At the end of the training each owner and dog must pass a rigorous test and then further acceptance by the hospital is required. At the present time, I have three dogs (Summer, Zooney and Flower) that I escort on different days of the week, along with their owners. Once in the room, as the patient begins petting or hugging the dog, I take a photograph. After I print and frame the photo, I present it to the patient with the compliments of Silver Cross Hospital. The smiles are priceless! Some patients get emotional and I see tears running down their faces. They tell me they miss their own pets at home. However, having a dog visit them really brings them comfort. Sometimes I listen to their personal stories, and many times I hear of why they are in the hospital. Every time I enter a patient's room I become more convinced that the dogs bring a welcome relief from the stress and anxiety that a hospital stay can bring. I feel very blessed to be able to have this opportunity to reach out in a unique way to those who are in need of understanding while trying to cope with their illnesses. Pet therapy is making a huge difference in the lives of individuals and it is a real privilege for me to be a part of this worthwhile and needed ministry.

The other volunteer ministry that I am blessed to be a part of is helping out at Daybreak Homeless Shelter in Joliet. Not only do I love to cook, (thank you, Mom) but it also gives me a chance to interact with the residents, many of whom are mentally challenged, have addiction issues, or are just down on their luck. Once or twice a week I help to prepare and cook the lunchtime meal for about 100 clients including children. Meeting and talking with many of the volunteers who come from different churches and organizations is also very gratifying. Knowing how many good and kind people that I am surrounded by, even in an often depressing environment, brings me joy. Because I came from a loving and supportive family it is difficult to hear of the hardships that many people face daily. I am so grateful to have this opportunity to reach out to God's chosen. During each school semester I am also on a rotating schedule with the University of St. Francis students and staff to help with the breakfast meal as well. Sometimes I find myself walking into the shelter with half-closed eyes because we begin cooking at 5 a.m. in the morning!

Years ago the majority of Joliet Franciscan Sisters either taught in schools or were involved in education in some way. Today the Joliet Franciscans are involved in several ministries, too numerous to mention, and there are ministries that many may consider "unique." No matter the age or past experience, we, the Joliet Franciscan Sisters are called to make a difference. As our founder, Mother Alfred Moes taught her Sisters, if there is a need, we must meet it. We are always on the road and the journey is ours. It is as simple as that!



Sr. Sharon shares her culinary knowledge at Daybreak Homeless Shelter every week.