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Former journalist heeds calling as associate with Sisters of Providence

Sr. Camille D'Arienzo | Sep. 17, 2013 Conversations with Sr. Camille

Author's note: It is with a heavy heart that we bid farewell to Dave Cox, who died in early October 2013 after a short illness. We are grateful that Providence gave us a chance to make this good man better known through our conversation.

***Sr. Camille*: For quite a few years, you've published press releases and articles and worked on*HOPE* magazine, which tells of the mission and ministry of the Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind. This is the context in which I've come to appreciate and admire you. How and when did you connect with this community?**

Cox: After 30 years or so working in newspaper journalism as a reporter, editor and administrator, I joined the Sisters of Providence staff 14 years ago. I learned that the congregation was looking for someone to do media relations, and I felt a tremendous prompting that it was where I needed to be. Fortunately, they agreed to let me come aboard.

How would you describe what you do for the Sisters of Providence?

For most of my time here, my primary role has been to handle all media contacts and news releases. With the influence of social media, that's a little more fluid now. I still handle the congregation's major news releases, but some of that work is now shared with another staff member. I also write stories for the congregation's blog, *HOPE* magazine and other publications. Of course, I work closely with the general administration. After that, the horizon widens some. For many years, I worked with the Vocation Advisory Team. Now, I work with Providence Associates, preparing materials for their part of the website, doing stories and news releases and assisting with updates to printed materials.

Also, I am a member of the congregation's Anti-Racism Team, and I represent the congregation on the Human Rights Day planning committee in Terre Haute, a major partnership and event associated with Indiana State University. And I work with community organizations like the local tourism bureau, Chamber of Commerce, local and state government. I also dabble in some event-planning tasks, and I research and write a monthly staff wellness newsletter.

What have these sisters done for you?

This could be a long answer. First, they've taught me many things simply by being who they are and doing what they do. They have re-energized and fertilized my roots of spirituality. On the job, they've allowed me to be creative, to explore new opportunities, and to make connections for them with different segments of the public. They also have allowed me to become a Providence Associate. I'm still feeling my way with that relationship, as are a lot of us. It's a fairly new experience for the Sisters of Providence, but has grown to more than 170 associates in just seven years. It will strengthen my personal connection, creating a different layer beyond the workplace. Of course, I feel like I've been an associate all of my life. My grandfather and great-grandfather worked here, and my mother did also while she was in high school.

To answer the question literally, it would begin with classroom instruction, creating a solid foundation for learning, teaching young children how to think, analyze and do things the right way. The list of what the Sisters of Providence have done for me and my family and thousands of other families could go on and on.

What is most satisfying about your work?

Easy -- helping the Sisters of Providence**.**

Does your work affect your home life?

Well, yes and no. No, because I try very hard to leave the daily demands at the door when I leave work each day. I'm pretty good about that. I do take work home occasionally to finish something or to do some research that I couldn't get to in the office. And there's even an occasional after-hours interview that needs to be done. The "yes" part is that the sisters' influence stays with me. I see things differently. I address things differently. I try to use the tools of the congregation's charism in the way that l live.

What is your home life like?

I am so blessed. My wife, Brenda, has put up with me for a little more than 42 years now. We have a quiet life, and that's good. We have two children: our son, Brian, and his wife, Christine, live in Chandler, Ariz., and Brian works in Phoenix. They have two beautiful little boys, Zachary and Gavin. Our daughter, Sara, lives in Lee's Summit, Mo., and works in Kansas City. When I say we are blessed, I have to say that nurturing our children was an easy and beautiful experience. God really smiled on us with the gifts of Brian and Sara, and now our daughter-in-law and grandsons as well. We all enjoy most sports. I enjoy gardening and yard work. We all are habitual readers and we have typical family interests in cooking, crafts, etc. We cherish the time we have with our son's family and our daughter. We know they are happy and have good lives, but distance is a challenge.

Where did you grow up and with whom?

I grew up in Terre Haute, Ind., with my parents, who were hard-working, middle-class role models. I have one brother, Paul, and one sister, Carolyn. Another sister died at birth. We were close to our grandparents. I think what I appreciated most about Mom and Dad is that they let us have the freedom to become ourselves, mistakes and all. We certainly had challenges, but we also had a lot of fun.

Who most influenced your belief system?

My mother's family members were dedicated Catholics. They didn't seem to get involved in a lot of extracurricular church activities, but they were faithful practitioners. That impressed me when I was young. My father was always supportive of our faith and encouraged us to be faithful. He was not a "church guy" because he had a bad experience when he was a child. He attended Mass with us on special occasions, even though he was not Catholic. Then, the Sisters of Providence took over. They tried to teach us students right from wrong

and how to live with kindness, generosity, compassion, commitment and a basketful of other virtues and characteristics that, along with family influence, made me who I am today -- whoever that is. I'm also influenced by being connected with sisters' ministries. Some of their accomplishments are phenomenal and not always in a place where success is easy to achieve.

Where do you worship?

I was baptized and nurtured through Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Terre Haute. Of course, Sisters of Providence were teachers at the school there. I float around some now to local churches. Of course, I am in the Church of the Immaculate Conception here at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods often. It's a beautiful, peaceful place.

How do you pray?

This is a challenge. I feel so inadequate. Just among family and friends -- and I include the Sisters of Providence family, staff and their families in that collection of people -- there's significant need for prayer. People are ill. People suffer hardships. People have turmoil in their lives. People have cause for celebration. The community in which I live has the same challenges. And then, to broaden that to world events, tragedies, poverty, hunger, homelessness, disease. How do you determine the priorities for prayer? I want to pray for all of them all the time. I know that's not realistic. The one element that I do have success with: I start my prayers each night with great gratitude. I am so blessed; I know it; I know where those blessings come from; and I am extremely grateful.

What do you most value in your faith tradition?

One of my earliest memories of having Sisters of Providence as teachers is that they helped us as children understand that Catholic means "universal." I take it to mean that everyone is welcome and can be part of the church. In today's politicized world, that doesn't always seem to be the case. However, the ideal is something I cling to. Also, the mysteries of our faith tradition have always intrigued me. I supposed that's all of those years as a journalist coming out in me. I want to know who. I want to know why. I want to know how. The curiosity created within those mysteries stimulates me.

Do you have a favorite Scripture passage?

Something that always comes to mind is not really Scripture; it is more prose. But the short message of Footprints in the Sand makes a lot of sense in my life. When I look back along the meandering beach of my life, I have no doubt that God has been with me all the way and carried me when I was weary or needed help.

Now, at age 61, what is your image of God?

I embrace God in my life as a parent and a partner. I go to God when I need guidance, affirmation, advice, support, healing, forgiveness; when I need to be reminded of something; or when I am seeking blessings or calm or peace or healing for others. I would just love to pull up a chair alongside God's chair, have some iced tea and play a game of Scrabble. Just have a good conversation. What a learning experience that would be. Of course, God would win the Scrabble game.

W**hat does the Incarnation mean to you?**

From an interviewer's perspective, this is an intriguing question. So I'll give it a try. God comes to us in human form through his son, Jesus. I suppose it shows us that God is among us always. In human form, Jesus suffered physical pain from those who were filled with anger or fear, as do we when we are attacked or violated. Jesus was a teacher, as are we when we nurture our children or share our knowledge. Jesus was a healer, as are we

when we are called upon to help others in illness or need. Jesus was a provider, as are we when we share our food, drink and clothes with those who are less fortunate. Jesus was a counselor, as are we when we listen to our relatives or friends and try to help them through difficult times. Jesus was a leader, as are we when we are called upon to assist our churches, our local communities, our neighborhoods or our families. Jesus was a friend, as are we when we are called to be a companion to our spouses, our acquaintances. Jesus showed us by example and left us to figure it out through the many generations that have followed. Jesus experienced the joy of Resurrection, as will we when our turn comes to join with our Provident God in the afterlife. Oh my gosh. That sounds like a sermon. I have no idea where that came from.

What causes you sorrow?

I would have to say the divisiveness in the world today. It is present in our nations, and it always will be. At the national level, our legislative leadership is in peril. There is no attempt to reach mutual ground for the benefit of common good. It also trickles down to our neighborhoods, our streets, our communities, even to our churches. It would be terribly naïve to think that everyone would be in total agreement on every issue. But we can disagree with one another and still be respectful. We can stand our ground without violence. We can accept one another's cultural differences and learn to share them and thrive with them. None of that is very hard, but it does take effort.

What gives you hope?

Miracles. It's inspiring to me to see them happen to others. I see them all the time, especially here at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in the midst of Saint Mother Theodore's spirit and legacy. You can call them special blessings, or spiritual influences, or whatever. But they are real and they are present with every day. If you're looking for the winning lottery ticket, you'll have a long wait. You're not looking hard enough. The miracles we receive may not be what we ask for. Maybe we'll get what God believes is a feasible substitute. Maybe God gives us "enough," which may not match up well with our perceived needs or desires. But you hear people every day say, "Boy, that was a miracle." Yep, maybe it was. Maybe we just didn't recognize it that way. I try to be grateful for those little miracles that sustain us.

How do you relax?

Doing yard work is relaxing for me, and a little gardening (vegetables and flowers). I love the beauty of a freshly manicured lawn, a colorful array of flowers and the tasty vegetables. I enjoy golf now and then, watching sports (mostly baseball), reading, playing cards occasionally, daily exercise (which tends to be somewhat spiritual for me). I also enjoy playing Words with Friends on my iPad. I often have seven or eight games or more going at once.

Are you inspired by any saint?

Oh, my. This is the easiest question to answer. One of my goals in life is to read more about all of the saints, but I pass by a saint's shrine almost every day. How cool is that? Saint Mother Theodore Guerin's remains are here at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. We've had visitors from all 50 states, several foreign nations, and contacts and prayer requests from all over the world. Still, she is not a well-known saint. Those who do know her, however, adore and admire her. By founding the Sisters of Providence in a dense Indiana forest with bare-necessity resources and living a holy life, she set the tone for who her daughters are today. Her influence is still very strong. What a woman she must have been! She's another person I'd like to have a good conversation with. I would invite anyone to explore her life and get to know her better. She is so real, even today.

[Mercy Sr. Camille D'Arienzo, broadcaster and author, narrates *Stories of Forgiveness*, a book about people whose experiences have caused them to consider the possibilities of extending or accepting forgiveness. The

audiobook, renamed *Forgiveness: Stories of Redemption*, is available [1] from Now You Know Media.]

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