

Profile in Mercy: Sister Victoria Vondenberger

Adjusting her lacy veil, young Victoria “Vicki” Vondenberger thought about becoming a Sister of Mercy during her First Communion. “After the ceremony, I told my parents I would be going to church every day,” she says.

Joe and Daisy’s oldest of five and only daughter had a head start. Born with the umbilical cord around her neck, she was baptized three times: Once by the doctor who delivered her, once by the attending nurse and later by the pastor at St. Mary’s in Piqua, Ohio, where she attended grade school and met the Sisters of Mercy.

This “extrovert with a high need for solitude” grew along with her faith. She briefly wondered about becoming an airline stewardess, but as her prayer life deepened, she knew – the right path for her would take her higher than a plane could fly.

After entering the community in 1963, she earned her bachelor’s degree from the former Our Lady of Cincinnati College, her master’s degree from Xavier University in Cincinnati, and served in high school education for 20 years before studying canon law.

She earned her J.C.L. degree from the University of St. Paul in Ottawa, Canada, and was appointed Tribunal Director for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. She held that position for 30 years, teaching canon law, winning national awards, giving presentations in Rome, publishing 45-plus works and creating numerous workshops. She continues to minister full time as Promoter of Justice and Defender of the Bond (of marriage) while also serving as Canonical Advisor. In October 2017, she received the Canon Law Society’s coveted Role of Law Award. In 50 years, this award has been bestowed upon only six women, two being Sisters of Mercy: Sister Sharon Euart and Sister Vicki.

In 1996, she and the late Sister Mary Aloyse Gerhardstein, who shared local community for 20 years, used their Jubilee money to visit and assist refugees at the House of Mercy in Mozambique. They later raised over \$250,000 for the works of Mercy missions in South Africa.

Yet, Sister Vicki considers her greatest accomplishments to be what might seem minor. “Sometimes the biggest things might be kind of small, with God working through us to do something in someone’s life.”

This was underscored when her brother, Bobby, committed suicide. After comforting her family, a grieving Sister Vicki returned to McAuley Convent. There one of the oldest sisters was waiting for her and confided that her brother also committed suicide – when the church did not allow a funeral. So, he was buried across the road from the Catholic cemetery. Sister Vicki asked several priests to bless his grave. They all gathered graveside for a peaceful closure. That sister died soon after. “Sometimes the worst thing that happens to you is your gift to understand what somebody else is going through,” she says.

Sister Vicki enjoys reading, working jigsaw puzzles, doing counted cross-stitch, embroidery, knitting and quilting. She has handstitched quilts for close family members, making the first one 40 years ago.

Sister Vicki is inspired by the current Mercy cross logo, which reminds her of dancing. "Not only are the 'feet' dancing, but because there is no bottom line, it is open to new calls to be Mercy. It reminds me that our original sisters in Dublin were 'the Walking Nuns' because of Catherine McAuley's ministry model of going out among the poor at a time when most women religious were enclosed in monasteries."