

Sister Elizabeth Kremp

Faithful to God's Call

Now in her 50th year as a Sister of Charity, Sister Elizabeth Kremp's life continues to be defined by her steadfast commitment to the call to religious life. Sister Liz first became aware of this call when she was in high school. In her evolving ministries as a Sister of Charity, Sister Liz has tried to be faithful as she places her trust in the God who leads her.

Elizabeth grew up in Kenilworth, New Jersey, a community that expanded rapidly after World War II and seemed to be full of children close to Elizabeth's age. Except for kindergarten, she attended parochial school and was taught by the Dominican Sisters at St. Theresa School in Kenilworth and by the Sisters of Charity at Saint Mary High School in Elizabeth.



She recalls that throughout her early years, “the church was really the center of our lives.” Elizabeth's mother was very active in the Catholic Church; her father was a Lutheran who converted to Catholicism when Elizabeth was in high school. Virtually all of Elizabeth's activities, including Girl Scouts and YCS (Young Christian Students), revolved around the church or the parochial school.

While still in high school, Elizabeth became aware that God was calling her to religious life. “It was this persistent call from God that I couldn't put out of my mind.” Although Elizabeth had planned to attend Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, New York, she instead entered the Sisters of Charity directly out of high school. It was 1965, and it was a very exciting time in the life of the Church. Elizabeth was one of 76 young women in her entering band, one of the largest groups of young women ever to enter the Sisters of Charity. Sister Liz recalls, “Everything was changing. The Vatican Council had just ended, and the whole Church and all of religious life was in transition. It was like we had one foot in two different worlds. We were living some of the pre-Vatican II practices while we were being educated with all the Vatican II documents.” Change came to the sisters in many forms, from little things such as the permission to wear wristwatches for the first time to a new freedom to discern their own ministries and use their gifts wherever God was calling them.

Sister Liz studied elementary education at the College of Saint Elizabeth and looked forward to serving as an elementary school teacher. Her first ministry was teaching first grade at St. Rose of Lima School in Newark. After a year in that ministry, she learned about the Sisters of Charity's ministry in Pensacola, FL, from a sister who had just returned from there. “I heard about the need there and it really touched my heart.” Sister Liz taught at St. Joseph School in Pensacola in two separate spans for a total of seven years.

Sister Liz loved her work in Pensacola. “I'd go back there in a minute!” In addition to teaching in Pensacola, she also started going to the local hospital to visit with parishioners and Catholics who had no parish affiliation. She was drawn to this one-on-one interaction and started studying for a master's degree in pastoral ministry.

After completing her studies and earning an M.A. in Pastoral Ministry from Fairfield University, Sister Liz served a year of clinical residency at St. Raphael Hospital in New Haven, CT. In 1984, Sister Liz returned to Florida to serve as a hospital chaplain at St. Joseph Hospital in Tampa. “Most of my time was as chaplain of the children's hospital. We had an 84 bed children's hospital there, and I loved that ministry. When our hospital

bought a women's hospital that was right across the street, I became the first chaplain of that hospital. I worked a lot with women who had difficult pregnancies or who had children in the neonatal ICU.”

As Sister Liz became more and more involved with the lives of the hospital patients she saw as a chaplain, she began to feel called to help people with their struggles through the ministry of counseling. The hospital and the congregation both supported her studies for a Masters Degree in Clinical Social Work, which she earned from the University of South Florida in 1997. Following graduation, she stayed on at the hospital to work with mental health patients.

In 2004, Sister Liz returned to New Jersey and continued to work in the field of mental health and later in hospice care. During this period, she studied to become a spiritual director. These studies nourished her own spirituality at the same time as they equipped her to help others in a new ministry. They also served to draw Sister Liz back in the direction of the pastoral ministry she had provided as a hospital chaplain.

In 2010, an opening arose for a social worker at Saint Anne Villa, the Sister of Charity's long term care and assisted living facility. Much to the joy of the sisters and staff at the Villa, it seemed that God was calling Sister Liz to become an integral part of the Villa community.

A few months after starting at the Villa, Sister Liz moved from social worker to become the Director of Pastoral Care. In this ministry, her work is varied and “always interesting.” The ministry of pastoral care at the Villa is a team effort, with tremendous contributions provided by Sister Liz's co-worker, Miriam Healy, and volunteers, Sister Dolores Walsh, Sister Elizabeth Brennan, Sister Edna Hersinger, Sister Ursula Kendig, and Sister Maria Anne Palkovics. Sister Liz and the pastoral care team strive to involve the resident sisters in the ministry as much as possible, and many sisters serve as lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, and choir members.

In the ministry of pastoral care at the Villa, Sister Liz is intimately involved with both the joys and the losses of the community. The joys are abundant, from the smiles and laughter so present among the sisters and staff members, to the simple pleasures that come from shared activities and day-to-day kindnesses, to the deep joy that comes from a faith filled assurance of God's constant presence and ever renewing love. One of the most joyous times every year at Saint Anne Villa is the celebration of Jubilees in June. “The preparation for the Jubilees is always intense, but they are just wonderful occasions, really fun!”

As Sister Liz shares in the joys, she also provides comfort in times of loss and helps sisters cope with the challenges that accompany physical diminishment. “I can see as the sisters become more frail. Some of them become more forgetful. It's difficult. Just visiting the sisters, being there for them, is really the most important thing that I do.” Sister Liz is also responsible for funeral arrangements and working with family members when a sister passes away.

Sister Liz is continually moved by the deep faith and example of the sisters in Saint Anne Villa. “It's just amazing, the time they spend in prayer, and you think of the lives they've lived and the service they've given.” The sisters inspire her with their resilient spirit. “One of the sisters walks laps around this building three times a day, and I go home and I have to fight with myself to get on the treadmill. I say if she can do it, I can do it.” She cares deeply about each sister, and she knows that they care about her. Sister Liz is especially aware of the profound bond with her sisters when she serves as a Eucharistic Minister at a mass in the chapel. “The chapel will be filled with sisters and I know the name of everyone who comes up for Holy Communion. I feel that connection. It touches my heart.”

In September, Sister Liz will celebrate her 50th Jubilee as a Sister of Charity. She reflects that “the main theme of my life is really God's call. I pray and try to keep listening. I know that God is leading me. I might not ever know, but I hope I make a difference.” Sister Liz does her best to live in the present, continually energized by the mandate of Luke 4:18 “to bring good news to the poor and proclaim liberty to captives.” She concludes, “Even though I may fail, I try to be faithful. I know that God is always faithful to me.”