

Sister Charlene Wedelich
January 2, 1933-July 10, 2020

In my last visit with Sister Charlene, we had a conversation about the many blessings in her life. She had just returned from the hospital for the last time and had decided not to have any further surgery on her leg. She told the doctor that she had lived a good life and was ready to go home. I wanted to make sure this is what she wanted and that she was at peace.

When we began talking, she pointed to the pictures in her room starting with her parents, siblings, nieces, nephews and other relatives. She said, "I have been lovingly touched by so many wonderful people in my life, beginning with my mom, dad and family. Look at them. We gathered at Moye Center for a reunion. It was wonderful." Then she moved to pictures of priests, Bishops, Archbishops, and the Pope. She talked about her friendship with them.

She then shifted around to lay people, co-workers, CDP Sisters and other women and men religious. She added, "I feel very grateful for all the blessings that Providence has bestowed on me. God has blessed me with a wonderful life." She repeated to me, "I am ready to go home." Who was this woman so at peace and prepared to meet her God?

Sister Charlene Wedelich was born on January 2, 1933 in Houston, Texas. She was one of four children born to Henry and Hilda Wedelich. She was baptized Patricia Ann affectionately called "Patsy." She entered our Congregation on September 12, 1955 and made her first profession on June 22, 1957. Charlene was raised in a devout Catholic family and educated in Houston Catholic Schools: St. Anne's Parish School (CDP), St. Agnes High School (Dominican Sisters), and the University of St. Thomas (Basilian Fathers).

Sister Charlene traced the beginnings of her religious vocation to the modeling of religious life by the Sisters of Divine Providence at St. Anne's. She recalled, "Our whole family life revolved around the Sisters. I used to help them on Saturdays. Sister Ida would always give me candy. Sister Charlene started practicing early in her life to be a Sister. She and her friends would love to play 'nun.' They would dress in their brother's altar boy cassocks and used cardboard to make the head pieces which they covered with a veil. Even then she was attracted to this way of life."

In an interview for a Congregational newsletter, Charlene further recalled, "When I was at St. Thomas University, the Maryknoll Fathers came and gave us a workshop. They showed us a movie on mission life that made a huge impact on me. I felt that the children shown in the film were calling me to religious life. I stuck the brochure they handed out into my political science textbook and could never throw it away. Every time I opened the book, it haunted me.

Eventually I told my mother. She wasn't surprised and said she had always prayed that one of her daughters would become a Sister of Divine Providence."

Her parents advised her to finish her degree at St. Thomas. After finishing college, Sister Charlene decided to teach at St. Anne's. Little did she know that she owed her religious vocation to all the ice cream that the Sisters ate that year. Sister Dorothy Hunter, Principal, loved ice cream and she had declared that the Sisters would eat ice cream that year for vocations. Charlene said, "Well, I guess it worked! That year three of us from St. Anne's Parish entered the Congregation!" When Charlene

retired to Regan Hall, she ate ice cream everyday for dessert. I always thought it was because she liked it. Now I know it was because she was carrying on the tradition of eating ice cream for vocations.

Charlene's life in the Congregation included teaching ministries at Prompt Succor Elementary School in Alexandria, Louisiana and Bishop Kelly High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Congregational Director of Formation; Congregation Regional Coordinator; CDP Superior General; Vicar for Religious; Member of the Archdiocese of San Antonio Administrative Staff; and CDP Director of Mission Support.

Sister Suzanne Dancer remembered that between 1967-1972 when Charlene was part of our Congregation's formation program, Charlene was also an active member of the Sister Formation Movement. This group of forward-looking women religious leaders established after Vatican II envisioned a new breed of Women Religious. Noted Theologian Sandra Schneiders, IHM wrote, "As early pioneers, they sought to prepare Sisters not just to teach and nurse in their own institutions, but also to minister in an emerging world."

Sister Charlene was one of the early women to mold our formation programs to prepare young women and men for a life of service in a post-Vatican II global world. Schneider further states, "We stand on the shoulders of risk-takers and builders. May we be worthy of our ancestors." Charlene is truly one of those early builders and risk-takers.

After serving as the Congregation's Superior General between 1973-1981, Sister Charlene assumed the role as first woman Vicar of Religious and Co-Coordinator with Father Larry Stuebben of the 1987 visit of Pope John Paul II to San Antonio. She was the only woman in the United States to hold that position. Charlene brought wisdom, creativity and vision to whatever position she held.

There is an endless list of Charlene's accomplishments, but what surpasses these achievements are the relationships and meaning for those who were fortunate enough to have known and/or worked with her.

Martha Brinkman, former editor of the Archdiocesan Catholic Newspaper and co-worker of Sister Charlene, wrote, "She may be my most admired CDP. She is one of my present-day role models: she is smart and kind, yet she isn't afraid to show when she is upset. She always has time to listen when I go to her for advice, which she gives with love and understanding. She is a good friend to so many people and so dedicated to her work... With her quiet ways, many people may not notice Sister Charlene, but when she is not there you miss her deeply. She is a modern woman and an example of what today's women religious can be."

When Sister Charlene was asked what it meant to her to be a Sister of Divine Providence, she simply said, "It is my life. It is my identity. It is who I am."

And so, dear Charlene, we thank you for your 63 years of professed life as a Sister of Divine Providence and for all you gave our Congregation, community, diocese, Church, and our world. We will miss you. May we live with the same faithfulness, risk-taking and dedication as you did. And we will continue eating ice cream for vocations. Amen.

Sister Pearl Ceasar, CDP