

Day in the Life of a Sister

School Sisters of Notre Dame have ministered in the diocese for more than 100 years

By LeAnn Eckroth
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In the sixth feature of “A Day in the life of a Sister” series, Sr. Ivo Schoch shares her faith journey with the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND).

Sister Ivo attributes her loving parents, Jerome and Emma (Binstock) Schoch, for raising 14 children in the Catholic faith and her SSND teachers in both grade school and high school for leading her to the call of religious life.

The family farmed between Scheffield and New England, N.D. where she garnered a strong work ethic and prayer life. With five brothers and eight sisters, she learned how to interact and live with others. She milked cows by hand, fed chickens, hoed the garden, shocked grain, cooked and baked, along with many other daily chores.

Sister Ivo celebrated her 62nd year as a School Sister of Notre Dame, an order that has been ministering in the Diocese of Bismarck for more than 100 years. The SSND’s deep emphasis on education drew her to join them. Sister Ivo’s current ministry is parish outreach at the Church of Corpus Christi in Bismarck.

How did you begin to hear the call to religious life?

As early as fourth grade, I heard that voice within, “Be a sister!” Sister Aquiline had asked that we share what we hoped to be when we grew up. Without hesitation, I declared, “I am going to be a sister!”

The goodness and happiness of Sr. Emma Buresh, my sixth-grade teacher most inspired me and influenced my decision. I observed that besides being happy, Sr. Emma liked being who she was. My eighth-grade teacher thought my personality and conduct were much too “vibrant” to be a sister. But the “tangle of voices” prodded me to keep thinking, praying and discerning.

Today I want to say to young girls, “Have you thought about being a sister?” Or to fourth and fifth graders, “It’s not too early to pay attention to how God might be calling you.”

When did you make your final vows?

I made my first vows in 1960, and my final vows in 1966, all in our motherhouse chapel at Good Counsel in Minnesota. During the pandemic of 2020, my class and I celebrated our 60th jubilee virtually. This summer, in our historic chapel, I attended the jubilee celebration of 29 of our sisters celebrating 75, 70, 60, 50 and 25 years of religious life.

What is your typical day like?

After rising for prayer at 5:30 a.m., I am dressed for work by 7 and I do more prayer while I am walking; then start work for the parish by 8 a.m.

Waking up rested, I welcome with gratitude the new day God has given me and, in ending my day, I journal in gratitude for the ways God touched my life through the people I encountered.

As SSND, we are faithful to praying lauds and vespers, morning and evening prayers of the Church. Daily meditation

and quiet are important to me. I appreciate attending Mass at Corpus Christi parish where I have been ministering for 38 years. When a sister’s funeral is held in our provincial house in Mankato, it is wonderful to celebrate her life with our community via Zoom.

Since the pandemic, I join, daily, a community in London using the “Pray as You Go” app, listening to the readings of the day followed by a reflection on the Gospel. Also, weekly, via Zoom, I take the opportunity to sit in contemplation for 20 minutes with SSND across the U.S.

Doing an annual retreat and having spiritual direction have helped nourish and sustain my vocation. Exercise is an important part of my day. And in the life of every sister there is cooking, cleaning, laundry and shopping.

What is your current ministry?

Currently, my work is to minister to the sick and dying—assisting with wake services and at funerals and working with grieving families. I facilitate grief support groups through LOTUS (Looking Onward to Understanding and Serenity).

I visit parishioners who are homebound, in nursing homes or hospitalized to lend a listening ear, pray with them and bring Communion. I often assist with Communion services and pray the rosary at nursing homes. Other supportive services to our people are connecting with them via phone, sending a card, delivering prayer shawls, Corpus Christi’s clinging crosses and seasonal gifts from the parish. I also enjoy serving at “The Banquet”—the local non-profit organization feeding the hungry. Sometimes people come visit me at the office.

What is most important to me is to let our people know that the Church is here for them. We at Corpus Christi want to be part of people’s lives. Wherever we are, we need to be with people not only in their joys, but in their burdens, suffering and needs.

I hold a bachelor’s in education, a master’s in pastoral ministry and certification in grief counseling and support services. The first two decades as an SSND, I served as teacher and administrator in the Catholic school systems in North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. A highlight of my teaching career was at Saint Anne School in Bismarck from 1966-74. Later, I served as community leader at our provincial house in Minnesota.

What is the application process like for the community?

Discernment is key to finding whether a woman has a calling to religious life. This occurs through personal and communal prayer, spiritual direction, celebrations, ministry opportunities and other gatherings where professed sisters share their life’s journey. Usually, a woman is between the ages of 18 and 45.

She is encouraged to visit several different congregations to learn about the varied congregational charisms and see which resonates with her call. When she has come to know the SSND and feels called to take the first step of commitment, she



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applies to be an affiliate—a period lasting between six to 18 months. This is a time to further acquaint herself with the SSND life through a vocation director.

Postulancy follows, ordinarily a period of two years, where the postulant continues her discernment through life in community, prayer, study and ministry. Novitiate follows with two years at our one congregational novitiate in Rome. During this time, she has the opportunity to deepen her prayer life and experience intercultural community living in preparation for temporary profession. After completing the time of temporary vows and through mutual dialogue and discernment to a life commitment as an SSND, the woman is invited to profess perpetual vows.

What is the apostolate for the School Sisters of Notre Dame?

We minister in formal education, and we are retreat and spiritual directors, youth and pastoral ministers, grief counselors, doctors, lawyers, artists, companions to prisoners, the homeless, immigrants/refugees, to Native Americans and Latinos, advocates for others marginalized and much more. For us, education means enabling people to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God’s image and assisting them to share their gifts for the well-being of all.

How would you describe religious life for you?

I receive so much more than I give in grace and friendship. As an apostolic woman, religious life for me is to daily choose to live a “vocation choice,” that is to live my vows faithfully and generously and our SSND constitutions, and to do so in the spirit of our foundress, Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger.

Our congregational charism is “to make one”—to be about unity. I want to be Jesus personified who others meet and experience. I want, as a School Sister of Notre Dame, to have made a difference!

What do you do for fun?

I am a person who has many likes. Having taught the president of the Minnesota Twins, Dave St. Peter, at Saint Anne School in Bismarck, I recently enjoyed a Twins game in St. Paul. I treasure nature, finding God as I walk outdoors or as I exercise with others at the YMCA.

I love coffee times, parties and gatherings, be they with my SSND sisters, family or friends. I relish being around supportive, positive people who enjoy visiting in a sharing/listening exchange. I love Sudoku, other brain games, and reading as I believe these are helps



Sister Ivo’s sibling, Sr. Ann (left), is also an SSND and does outreach to Native Americans hospitalized and in nursing homes in Billings, Mont.

to keep me mentally alert. Doing something new, different and creative always gives me renewed energy and new life. To sum it up—God, people and leisure make up my day!

Is it rewarding to be a sister?

Absolutely! I am so blessed, so privileged to be a member of an international congregation. My life has been enriched by relationships and connections with God, SSND, family, friends, ministry, opportunities and experiences, all sources of nourishment and grace that have helped me respond to the many calls to follow Jesus’ mission in bringing God’s love wherever I have lived and served. I like being a sister and I am happy. I know I have chosen well.

I am so pleased that my congregation has made the commitment to the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, an initiative by Pope Francis to the entire Catholic Church to engage all sectors of the global Catholic Church in a seven-year journey to global sustainability and spiritual conversion.

Currently, 2,000 vowed SSND minister on five continents and in 30 countries. Our congregation was founded in 1833 in Germany. Just 14 years later, our foundress brought sisters to the United States. I entered the congregation in Mankato, Minn. where our sisters came to minister as early as 1865. The first SSND arrived in the Bismarck Diocese in 1917 where hundreds have ministered these past 105 years. Though there was never a convent established here, 65 young women from our diocese became a School Sister of Notre Dame.

Other SSND sisters ministering in the diocese

Sister Ivo’s sibling, Sr. Ann, is also an SSND and does outreach to Native Americans hospitalized and in nursing homes in Billings, Mont. Also residing and ministering in Bismarck is Sr. Karen Warren. In addition, three SSNDs—Sr. Annette Dobitz, Sr. Gladys Reisenauer and Sr. Rosemarie Dvorak—live and minister in education and healthcare in Dickinson.

For more information about SSND visit www.ssnd.org or www.gerhardinger.org.