

175 SISTER PROFILES: Sister Judy Park

Sister Judy Park

How fortunate I have been to be immersed in ministries that totally captured my heart.

When I became Director of Pastoral Care at St. Mary's—now Mercy First—a residential treatment center for at-risk youth, I had already journeyed with hundreds of young people as a teacher. Now these young people—all boys, except for the few girls in our group homes, were to become very special to me. The major part of this labour of love was to listen and guide teens as they came to me in my pastoral care office. And come they did—frequently, to unburden themselves, to be angry and vulnerable, to



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CELEBRATING

175

YEARS OF JOYFUL WITNESS

1849 - 2024



**Sister Judy, Director of Pastoral Care
St. Mary's Children and Family Services, Syosset, NY**

question God or to have me offer a prayer for them.

I was referred to as "The Sis" and little could I have ever imagined the trust they would place in me. "Don't Dis the Sis" was a phrase I heard boys tell newcomers! The Sisters of Mercy founded and ran the agency

and they were loved and trusted by the boys.

I could write forever of the poverty and the pain they came from, or the abuse suffered, or the sting of racism in their lives, or the abandonment of them on so many levels.



Sister Judy
St. Agnes Academic High School, College Point, NY

But that would not be the whole story. For to me, their story was defined by their courage—the sheer courage it took to get out of bed and work at the life ahead of them, every single day. I can tell of days I choked up in the records room as I read their files which told bleak and dangerous stories; and days I listened in awe as they told me how

they weren't hungry all the time anymore, or how their parent was going to be released from prison or rehab, or how they liked going to school now because the teachers cared.

They came to the chapel to worship ... with a wonderful elderly Baptist minister who was a father figure to them, with the Vincentian priests



Sister Judy
St. John's Bread and Life

who said Mass every week. They all stayed and talked with the boys. One time when we had confession—and anybody could go and talk to the priest about “stuff”, Jim, a great Vincentian, stood in the doorway after the last one left. With tears in his eyes Jim said: “No kids should be carrying these burdens.” That kind of summed it up. For many it was a place of healing—against all odds. It

was a place to give hope, a place to prepare them for what was next.

Being chaplain at St. John's Bread and Life in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn was also a ministry close to my heart. As soon as I walked into the building, I knew I wanted to work there. Luckily, the Executive Director wanted that too! This was a soup kitchen with many services—



**Sisters Frances Gritte, Judy, Fran Fahey, Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick, Josephine D'Agostino, Virginia Blend and Barbara Buxton
St. John's Bread and Life volunteers**

immigration, medical, food pantry, the mobile soup kitchen van that travelled into poor neighborhoods. It was a workout as the needs were daunting. This was a ministry of presence, of listening, of accompanying very real and wonderful people. Every day as I approached the building—I uttered the same prayer: “God give me the strength I will need this day and help me bring joy into this

building.” My prayer never changed as the need never changed. Again, I found myself among a people who so trusted the nuns. It was a much loved Daughter of Charity who founded the soup kitchen—Sister Bernadette.

So many of us, in our retirement, who had been the only Sister of Charity in our previous ministries, now had the pleasure



Sister Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick St. John's Bread and Life Thanksgiving, 2023

of one another's company as we spent ourselves at the soup kitchen: Sister Maureen Murphy got the place rocking with song, Sister Kathleen Kull gave our fledgling crocheting and knitting group some expertise and enjoyment, Sister Liz Bickar warmly welcomed so many who came for social services. Sister Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick served on the Board of Directors and always helped out for our Thanksgiving meal and "Sponsor-a-Family" Christmas event. Sisters Frances Gritte, Barbara Buxton, Virginia Blend, Susan Dean and Josephine D'Agostino ably and

happily worked the mobile soup kitchen van bringing hot meals into the neighborhoods. Sister Fran Fahey initially volunteered with the "Sponsor-a-Family" Christmas event, then helped me out in the chaplain's office. Once a month she and I visited one of our guests in a residence in the Bronx. Working alongside one another was a great experience.

I thought of the words of Vincent de Paul: "I cannot tell you how much the poor have need of your living a long time!" Sister Marie Sorenson became the next chaplain and welcomed me back in a volunteer capacity. And so life ... and ministry goes on. Deo Gratias or perhaps better said, Gracias a Dios!