

Reflection from Joan Linley, December, 2021

From the moment I stepped foot onto this holy ground, I knew I was encountering “a new thing,” something real. What I found is a place where I could listen for the soundings of the depths and follow that call. I didn’t even suspect that four years later I would be led to serve on staff, or that I would be here fifteen years later. Mercy by the Sea stands like a beacon on the shores of Long Island Sound, a sacred place of freedom to deepen our relationship with that which is greater, to recognize the deep belonging we share with all of God’s creation, to enter the Mystery and touch Love. And, always, to go forth in the world with a new way of being. What joy it has been to be part of this ministry, as a retreatant and then as a member of staff!

Deep gratitude to each of you who has come to share your heart, tears, joys and prayers. You enliven the spirit and teach me what it means to be grace-full in all the ups and downs of life. Special thanks to the wise participants in The School for the Second Half of Life who draw me into the adventure of becoming “cosmic sentries” together (you know who you are!).

Deep gratitude to each of you who come for spiritual direction and show me what desire for God looks like in real time, that faithfulness is to be with what is real in life, that courage is to follow the compass of your heart.

Deep gratitude to each of you who were formed here as spiritual and retreat directors, and supervisors of spiritual directors, who taught me the strength of vulnerability, the skill of not-knowing and the wisdom of simply being.

Deep gratitude to each presenter and retreat director who offers all the ways of her knowing, the brilliance of his creativity, the soundings of her heart so that others may find hope and healing and new ways of being.

Deep gratitude to each of the women who formed me in Mercy spirituality, including: Companion in Mercy, Sue LaVoie; Sisters of Mercy Florence Trahan, Mary Daly, Judy Fortune, Elaine Deasy and Patty Cook. You taught me a whole new way to be, to see, to grow, to pollinate and to harvest. I hope with all my heart that I have warranted your trust. You enable me to find the joy in life wherever it takes me. Working with Sr. Eileen Dooling was a daily engagement with mercy, a wonder.

Deep gratitude to my work companions: Amanda, Sr. Ann, Bernadette, Diane, Gail, Gayle, George, Karen, Karin, Linda, Lori, Patty, Robert, Rose, Rosemary and Suzanne, each of you carrying gifts that go way beyond your job description. I appreciate the ways we come together in times of loss and grief and joy, especially in these last 2 years. A special note of appreciation to Karin Nobile, who has been a beloved partner in the program circle for the past 3+ years. To Leslie Reed Shields, co-facilitator in The School for the Second Half of Life for 3 cohorts and founder of programming for contemplative clinicians, it’s been a great joy and privilege to work with you through the

years. Many thanks for good works and good memories to former program circle members Claire Rusowicz and Betty Orosz.

As I go off to be with the wildness of God and grow into the wild edges of my own spirit, I invite you to consider Lynn Unger's question to us all:

“And you – what of your rushed
and useful life? Imagine setting it all down –
papers, plans, appointments, everything –
leaving only a note: ‘Gone
to the fields to be lovely. Be back
when I’m through with blooming.’ ”



On the beach at Mercy by the Sea, December, 2020.

Left to right: Sister Ann McGovern, Sister Anne Curtis, Joan Linley.