

# Heart ♥ to ♥ Heart



Vol. 9, No. 3

March 2024

For this month's issue, we have invited women and men who share ministry with the Roman Union Ursulines in the three USA provinces to share their experiences and reflections with us in response to these two questions:

*What has been your experience of ministry/connections with the Ursuline Sisters?*

*How have you come to know and appreciate St. Angela and her spirit through your ministry and connections?*



During my twenty-two years working with the Ursulines, most recently as the eastern province Director of Health Services, I have felt that I became part of a large extended family. As with any family, you feel a gamut of emotions: happiness, sadness, frustration, and even anger at times, but you always feel love. Even during trying times you never walk away. I have often told people that my job is more than just a job. You take your worries home with you just as you would with your immediate family. No two individuals are the same, and everyone gifts you with something unique. Developing and maintaining relationships is an ongoing process; yet these relationships enrich my life. Just as St. Angela could relate to people both within and outside her community, I too find myself connecting with our sisters, our fellow employees, and our sisters' family members as well. The Ursulines are a family that continues to touch my life, and I am grateful for that.

—Kathy Vernazza  
New Rochelle, NY

My primary experience with the central province Ursulines is my work since 2020 as the Medical Insurance and Benefits Coordinator. While some may say working with Insurance, Medicare, Social Security, and the like may be periodically mundane, the Ursulines have helped me experience both fulfillment and fun in my career. During my work with the Ursulines, I have discovered they are thoughtful, compassionate and oh so appreciative. It has been a joy to personally learn during the past 3 years what my mom (UA St. Louis '47) and my six UA St. Louis alumnae sisters have known for the past 80 years: the Ursulines are gifted and excel at St. Angela's call to "*Serviam.*" I have learned to deeply appreciate Angela's life and mission through both her writings and the lives of her present Ursuline Sisters. Angela has many great quotes in her writings, yet I think my favorite is "*Have hope and firm faith that God will help you in all things.*"

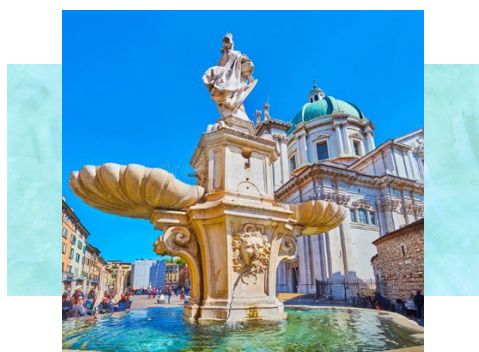
—Michael Puetz  
St. Louis, MO



As Religious Education Director for my local church, I began working with the western province's Srs. Mary Dostal and Pat Funderhide as co-facilitator for our collaborative Vacation Bible School program in 2005. My parish represents a large Hispanic community, and the sisters facilitated the Kateri Indian Ministries, which was led by and for Native Americans. In 2006, the sisters invited me onto the board of directors for their organization, *Angela's Piazza*, a women's drop-in center in Billings, MT. I had served on the board for four years when they invited me on as staff, and I now serve as director. I have always felt spiritually aligned with the mission and ministry of *Angela's Piazza*, including making your heart and home like a piazza, where everyone is welcome.

In my years at *Angela's Piazza*, I have grown to learn and more deeply understand the charism and teachings of St. Angela. Through our programs for marginalized women, and in our community gatherings, St. Angela's words are front and center: "May your words be compassionate leading to concord and charity." "Live in harmony, united together, all of one heart and one will." "Be pleasant and kind, striving to deal with others solely for the love of God and the good of souls." These words guide my work, my interactions with the women who come to *Angela's Piazza* seeking solace, a friend, a compassionate listener, a safe space to simply exist without judgement. St. Angela's teachings make this ministry not only possible but help our women to thrive!

—Amy Aguirre  
Billings, MT



I have had the privilege of working with the eastern province Ursulines for nearly a year as Director of Development. This experience has allowed me to delve into the rich history of the Ursulines and gain insight into the remarkable vision of St. Angela. Witnessing the sisters' unwavering dedication to their ministry has left me in awe of their boundless vigor and energy. The impact they have had on the lives of so many is truly remarkable, as evidenced by the countless cards and messages we receive from their many friends and donors expressing their love and gratitude. It is clear that the sisters' influence extends far beyond the classroom, leaving a lasting impression on those they have touched.

St. Angela's vision of forming and empowering women in a time when opportunities for these women were limited is truly inspiring. She was a woman who was ahead of her time, and I see how her legacy resonates today through the work of the Ursuline Sisters.

—Veronica Hinds  
New Rochelle, NY

My first introduction to the Ursuline Sisters was in elementary school; some of my teachers were Ursulines at, coincidentally, St. Angela Merici school in St. Louis. Years later, I was to meet the Ursulines again when I was hired to do secretarial work at the central province offices. I found women who were gracious, kind, who embraced life with an openness and attitude of service that looked remarkably freeing. It is a life of prayer, as well as work, but it is not compartmentalized. There is a oneness of spirit that infuses the day with meaning. As I've often heard, Angela's spirit can be likened to a piazza, open to God and to others, hospitable, and restful. A beautiful image that I have strived for in my own life and achieved success with only occasionally. However, Angela and the Ursulines around me have taught me the great value in persevering, blending prayer into action, one day at a time. St. Angela Merici, pray for us.

—Michelle Malawey  
St. Louis, MO



For the last 30 years, as a financial consultant and comptroller for the eastern province, my appreciation for St. Angela has deepened profoundly through my collaboration with them. Over the years, I have been privileged to work with so many brilliant and caring leaders. As a financial steward, I've come to realize how deeply rooted their mission is in St. Angela's values of service, education, and community. I have heard many stories of St. Angela's courage and resilience, which have inspired me to approach challenges with a similar spirit of determination and faith. The sisters often make personal sacrifices for others, following the example of St. Angela's selflessness and compassion. Ultimately, my work experience with the Ursulines has enriched my understanding of St. Angela's legacy and has reinforced the importance of integrating ethical principles and social consciousness into financial practices. I am dedicated to ensuring the Ursuline Sisters' legacy for generations to come.

—*Karol Cummins*  
New Rochelle, NY



It is a pleasure to work with the Ursuline Sisters with whom I have worked for half my life in my role as Director of Food Services and Housekeeping at the eastern province center. I enjoy helping the sisters and feel they are like my grandmothers and a second home. I enjoy celebrating feast days, especially the feast of Saint Angela, by decorating the dining room and making a special cake.

—*Lourdes Sanchez*  
New Rochelle, NY

SERVIAM  
SERVIAM

My experience with the Ursuline Sisters has been deeply personal and impactful, anchored by their steadfast example of faith and dedication. Initially hired by an Ursuline sister in 2013 as a long-term substitute in second grade at St. John's Elementary School in San Francisco, I quickly found myself immersed in a community that radiates warmth and devotion. Their unwavering commitment to service has been a guiding light, compelling me to remain at the school ever since. As I delved deeper into the Ursuline ministry and history, I felt a profound resonance in my heart, recognizing that St. John's was more than just a workplace—it was home. Now I am serving as principal. Through my work here, I have developed wonderful connections with several Ursulines, each embodying the spirit of service and compassion, a living embodiment of St. Angela's teachings. The passing of the beloved Sr. Lil, a beautiful soul and cherished member of the community, has left a void, yet I find solace in knowing that I now have an Ursuline angel watching over us, guiding and protecting our endeavors with her divine presence. I am so grateful

that I've had the honor to be a part of the Ursuline community and further the ministry of St. Angela.

Through my journey with the Ursulines, I've come to intimately know and deeply appreciate the spirit of St. Angela. My experience at St. John's has been profoundly personal and impactful, rooted in the sisters' unwavering dedication to faith and service. One tradition that stands out is the annual retreat at the Ursuline convent in Santa Rosa, led by Sr. Shirley, the former principal of St. John's. These three days were transformative, offering relaxation and a sacred opportunity to delve into St. Angela's charism. Immersed in her wisdom, I emerged with a renewed sense of purpose and dedication, ready to embody her spirit in my daily life. This connection with the Ursulines has not only enriched my professional life but has also deepened my faith and sense of belonging within a supportive community, allowing me to honor and further the ministry of St. Angela with gratitude and humility.

—*Alexandra Iwaszewicz*  
San Francisco, CA

Working with the Ursulines as the central province Director of Development/Communications has been the most peaceful, low-drama experience of my career. It is a gift to spend the day doing fulfilling work with women whose mission I support—and in a collaborative environment among people all of good will. Witnessing daily the sisters' spirituality and the way they live the gospel is inspiring and life affirming. When I began working here almost 17 years ago, I had not heard of St. Angela. Of course, her charisma was foremost in the orientation I received, but that was a lot of information being deposited in my brain all at once. The spirit of Angela truly seeps into your mind and heart little by little, as you experience it in even the smallest interactions with the sisters and all whose lives they have influenced.

—Susan Whelan  
St. Louis, MO

I have come to know more about St. Angela through my several years as a caregiver at the Ursuline eastern province center. I am truly blessed to work here because I have the opportunity to be around the Ursulines who have served others so generously through the years under the guidance and inspiration of St. Angela. It touches my heart how all the sisters are constantly serving others and sharing the faith in various ways, like the *Heart to Heart* publication. I feel St. Angela has become a big part of my life in my ministry assisting the sisters. I end with a beautiful quotation from her: "Strive to be faithful to that to which God has called you." God has called me to serve here, and in my work I turn to St. Angela to help me, asking her for strength and guidance to help me serve others generously and compassionately.

—Dontaysha Haynes  
New Rochelle, NY

St. Angela's spirit is alive and well in Texas; it continues to be expressed and expanded through the maturity and wisdom of the Ursuline community. St. Angela's spirituality has an imperative of simple and honest relationships that open one to the fullness of God. I have had the blessing of this expansion and imminence of God's love through interactions with each of the sisters in my service as health navigator for the Ursulines. My nursing practice focuses on tending to the whole person - mind, body and spirit. It seems to be a good fit with St. Angela, who says in the Ninth Legacy,

*"Give them what they need so they can spread good."* Healing is a holistic venture of tending and nourishing the vine, of giving attention to what matters most. I am grateful to the Ursuline community to have the gift of journeying with them, being a helper to those who have served others in so many generous ways. I have received much more from the Ursuline community than I have given and am filled with gratitude.

—Susan Ruzicka  
Dallas, TX



Through the years, I have come to know many Ursulines. I have witnessed firsthand their commitment to educating young women. My daughter, a graduate of The Ursuline School in New Rochelle, has greatly benefited from the Ursuline mission to educate, inspire and empower young women. I had the privilege of teaching religious studies at the school for sixteen years. In 2022, I joined the staff at the eastern province center and consider myself lucky to be working with Sr. Martha Counihan in the Archives. Sharing her vast knowledge of the history of the Ursulines, I have learned so much and now have a deeper appreciation

of the many contributions the Ursulines have made to the world. Of course, all done in the footsteps of St. Angela.

During my time as a teacher, the Ursuline School often celebrated and highlighted the life of St. Angela, a woman of courage and devotion to the teachings of Jesus and someone who bravely founded the Company of St. Ursula. Sr. Pat Schifini often reminded the school community, whether it was at retreats or at liturgy, that St. Angela welcomed all. St. Angela Merici—for centuries, her vision has enriched the lives of so many!

—Anna Butkowski  
New Rochelle, NY

My experience with the Ursulines in Moscow, Idaho extends for nearly 20 years:

- Serving on the Parish Liturgy Committee with Sr. Margaret Johnson
- Working on the *Cursillo* movement with the Ursulines (spiritual direction and discernment)
- Gardening with Sr. Dolores Helbling
- Ministry work with Sr. David Hartse
- Peer spiritual direction
- Being involved with others as Ursuline Companions in Moscow
- Teacher training at St. Mary's Parish School

I have come to know and appreciate St. Angela's spirit through daily messages (sent by email) that are words from Angela – they so often feed my soul and I am able so often to integrate Angela's message into my teachings and learnings that I do now in the southern part of the state (Boise) and really across the country. I work with hundreds of folks, and I often use Angela's words to inspire others. Her charism is being shared and spread with thousands of folks! I and those I share Angela's words with often reflect that they are the right words that need to be heard.

—Kevin Laughlin  
Moscow, ID



My connection with the Ursulines began as a student at Ursuline Academy in New Orleans in the 1980s. During those formative years, the sisters modeled how to treat others with care and compassion, respect each one for their uniqueness, and take risks in my decision-making. It wasn't until years later as a teacher at Ursuline that I would begin learning about Angela's spirit and realize how the sisters who taught me and were then my co-workers were guiding me to live the charism of our foundress. As Director of Mission and Identity for the central province, I have been blessed to meet many inspirational sisters who have shown me Angela's spirit of perseverance and grace. The sisters I work alongside each day have modeled Angela's spirit of discernment, relationship building, genuine care and concern for others, collaboration, gentleness, compassion, and respect. Throughout my life, each one of these beautiful women has been Angela in my midst.

—Karen Mortillaro  
St. Louis, MO

