

**Diane Fulgenzi, OSU**



“Big-hearted.” This is how Sister Diane Fulgenzi remembers the Ursuline sisters who taught her while she was a young woman enrolled at an Ursuline school in Springfield, IL. “They were big-hearted, open, and generous with their time.”

It is impossible not to smile when Sr. Diane offers this description, because it is exactly the way one would describe *her*. Sr. Diane has an incredibly warm and compassionate personality. She is someone you feel you can instantly trust, someone with whom you feel compelled to speak deeply and honestly about what might be on your mind. And there is no doubt that Sr. Diane would be eager to extend a listening ear and generously share her wisdom and time.

Sr. Diane grew up in Illinois. She is one of four siblings, and cherishes visiting her siblings and their families, who have remained in central Illinois.

During her time in high school, Sr. Diane discovered her gift for languages, thriving in French and Latin classes and excelling in her English writing courses. She considered journalism as a potential career. However, the more time Sr. Diane spent with the Ursuline sisters, the more she came to realize that she wanted to live a life like theirs: a life dedicated to serving others. The sisters were happy. They were hospitable, smart, and gracious. Sr. Diane's desire to emulate the Ursuline sisters led to the realization that joining the Ursuline Order was a real possibility for her own life.

Sr. Diane graduated from high school in May. Though she was not one hundred percent certain of her decision, she officially joined religious life in July of that same year.

The transition was difficult, just as it is challenging for any teenager to navigate the next phase of their life after graduation. However, Sr. Diane says that "Over time, I had a deepening in me. As I got to know myself better and know my gifts better — and as I realized more clearly what I wanted my life to be about — I knew religious life is the best way I could do that."

Sr. Diane quickly understood that the aspects of Ursuline religious life she had fallen in love with, serving others and teaching, are not the only responsibilities of being an Ursuline sister. Equally as important are self-reflection and discernment, investing in your relationship with God, and strengthening your relationships with your fellow sisters.

After joining the Ursuline Order, Sr. Diane enrolled at Fontbonne University and earned a Bachelor's degree in the French language. This catapulted her career serving as a French language teacher. Though she loved teaching French, Sr. Diane became more involved with the theology department and organizing campus ministry events like retreats, school masses, and service programs. This inspired her to enroll at Loyola University Chicago and earn her Master's in Religious Education. Later, she earned her Master's in Christian Spirituality from Creighton University.

After many years spent teaching in Ursuline schools around the country, Sr. Diane was asked to move into vocation ministry on behalf of the Ursulines. Sr. Diane would meet with women who were considering joining the Ursulines, and guide them through the discernment process as they looked within themselves and looked to God for guidance about their true calling. Sr. Diane acknowledges the challenges that come along with this position, but also saw her unique position as a "gift" because it allowed her "to be a part of the lives of these women as they contemplated how they wanted to spend their lives."

Vocation ministry is not only about recruiting Ursuline sisters — it is about truly guiding these women to their right path, their perfect fit, and helping them to see when religious life is not the best choice for them. Regarding discernment, Sr. Diane says that it "helps us to see where we belong, where we can be happy, and where we can be ourselves." Sr. Diane has a special ability to help others connect with their true selves, and in the process of

discernment, she has helped to grow Ursuline's ministry. Sr. Diane served in this position for six years, then continued to work in vocation ministry for the archdiocese of St. Louis before returning to Ursuline Academy in St. Louis, where she served as the school's Director of Mission.

Currently, Sr. Diane serves in a ministry position for the three Ursuline USA Roman Union provinces. In this position, Sr. Diane oversees outreach efforts focused on sharing the spirituality and charism of St. Angela Merici. Outreach includes writing and collaborating on the *Heart to Heart* newsletter which Ursuline Academy, Dedham publishes on our website every month. Sr. Diane works on this project with our very own Mary-Kate Tracy, Director of Mission and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Sr. Diane Fulgenzi is no stranger to the Dedham campus. She visits our campus at least once a year to conduct retreats for new faculty and staff to come together in prayer and learn about the history of the Ursuline Order and St. Angela Merici. As leadership in the Ursuline schools shifts from Ursuline sisters into the hands of lay people, Sr. Diane recognizes how important the retreats are to those who are taking up this ministry. It is of utmost importance that the legacy of St. Angela Merici and the mission of the Ursuline Order are constantly preserved and fulfilled.

When asked what words of wisdom she would like to share with our students, Sr. Diane said the following: "I would encourage them to take what Ursuline has given to them: the spirit of *Serviam*, the teachings of openness and respect for others, and the love modeled by St. Angela, and share it with the world. The world needs that so much right now."

Sr. Diane is a reminder of the importance of discernment in our personal lives and in the lives of others. Offering an ear and time to someone as they look within themselves to better understand their heart is one of the most simple, yet meaningful acts of service. May Sr. Diane continue to inspire us to spend time reflecting on our own calling, that we are the living legacy of St. Angela Merici, and to help others on their discernment journeys.

In our celebration of women's contributions to our world this month, we thank Sr. Diane for her generosity of heart, service, kindness, and devotion to the Ursuline Order. She is truly a guiding light to all those she encounters.