

Sister's work comes with soundtrack

Sister Mary Roy Weiss, S.S.N.D., knew early on she was being called to a vocation, but what she didn't know was how she would end up using music in her work.

The New Jersey native had studied piano and organ as a child, and she'd been taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

"Their spirit was just wonderful," she said. "I can remember them being joyful."

Her parents were resistant at first to her plans to enter the order right out of high school, but she persevered.

"I really loved God and I really loved people, and I wanted to share that love with many more people," she said, explaining why she felt called to the teaching order.

Today, she is the director of campus ministry at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland in Baltimore. As a young novice, she was sent to Manhattanville College to study music education.

After college, she taught music simultaneously in a grammar school and high school.

"I went the full route of having choruses and concerts," she said with a laugh. While preparing for her final vows, she studied theology and then taught religion.

Her high school students were putting on Broadway shows, and she planned to pursue a master's degree in musical theater. But then another sister told her about music therapy, and Sister Mary Roy was hooked. She earned a master's degree in music therapy from New York University.

She began incorporating music therapy into the normal school setting.

"It was wonderful because it was preventive," she noted. Students explored their emotions and reactions to difficult family situations through music. She also used guided imagery, where students listened to music in a relaxed state and then

processed what they pictured. She added psychology to her other teaching duties, too.

After more than a decade teaching in Brooklyn, she became the vocations director for her order's northeast province.

"In my vocation ministry, I began to really include music," she said, adding that people often point out that prayers are said in silence. "But music has a lot of silence in it; it enhances the sound."

She writes her own music as well. She composed music for the Stations of the Cross, and she wrote all the songs for the CD "Bridge to Glory."

"Most are Scripture-based," she said. One song she wrote, "The Good Shepherd," inspired by Paul's letter to the Corinthians, has been used by friends at their weddings.

"The songs can be used for weddings, prayer services or personal reflections," she said, adding that she uses them while giving retreats.

Sister Mary Roy is naturally curious. She's working on a doctorate in instructional leadership for changing populations, and she's interested in how people approach God - and how God approaches people.

"All religions are interesting to me," she said, adding that she's held a Passover Seder prepared by Jews, done interfaith workshops, visited mosques and started an interfaith group on campus.

"It's all about God's goodness," she said. "God really has approached me - I've been gifted in many ways."

She hasn't worn a traditional veil in years, but no matter what her position, she wears the hat of a vocations director.

"I used to tell students, 'I'm an undercover nun,'" she said with a laugh. "It's how we live that's more important than what we're wearing. It's a constant witnessing to religious life and how we live our lives."