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THE SISTERS OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD ■ DAYTON, OHIO

Volume 21 Number 3 ■ Fall 2010



Sister Ruth Ann's behind-the-scenes ministry

Below, Michigan math teachers explore
new technology for the classroom, thanks
to the efforts of CPPS Sister
Ruth Ann Meyer.



Read about it
on pages 6-7

Memories...

Beginning in the late 1920s, numerous teenage girls (like these pictured in 1938) attended the high school aspirancy of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. For 15 years, from 1950 to 1965, aspirants lived in Fatima Hall on the CPPS Dayton motherhouse campus. Some went on to become sisters, others to different walks of life.

Earlier this year, the last class of "Fatima Girls" gathered for a reunion, sharing their memories, stories and gratitude for the gift of that experience.

Read about it on page 14...



Photo courtesy CPPS Archives

***They teasingly call her
'the money nun.'***

***But it's her passion for education that
has brought this Ph.D. from
the math classroom
to hunting for funds that benefit
Michigan's underserved.***



Sister Ruth Ann's behind-the-scenes ministry

BY PAT MORRISON

KALAMAZOO, Michigan — Sister Ruth Ann Meyer's compact, tidy office on the campus of Western Michigan University gives a visitor a few visual clues as to what this lifelong math teacher is about these days. One wall contains shelves of large loose-leaf binders. A print of one of M.C. Escher's fascinating, mathematically inspired lithographs adorns another. And a large map of Michigan, marked with dozens of color-coded dots, takes up much of a third.

The binders document dozens of projects and related grant funding that Sister Ruth Ann has been active in developing and launching through WMU. The Escher print is eloquent testimony to her own passion for mathematics and its stretch toward infinity. The map indicates wide-ranging areas of the state where the university's research and funded projects have been implemented, from central city communities to the most rural (and low-income and academically underserved) parts of Michigan.

In a casual encounter with Sister Ruth Ann, one might never suspect the wealth of experience, education and expertise this quiet, soft-spoken Precious Blood Sister has brought to classrooms in elementary and high schools from Arizona to Ohio and universities from Notre Dame to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

One also wouldn't suspect that she has been the behind-the-scenes force in helping to obtain more than \$20 million dollars to conduct programs for Michigan's mathematics teachers.

Her brothers tease that she's "the money nun," she said.

But "I really don't like that," she says with a chuckle, shaking her head. "It sounds like I'm getting money for myself, or that I'm independently wealthy. And of course as a sister, with a vow of poverty, that's never the case." But her hard work and persistence have indeed brought in millions of dollars to WMU for the state's teachers — and she's proud that most of these monies are ultimately going to the service of the poor.

"People think 'poverty' in Michigan, and they immediately think of [the automotive centers] Detroit and Flint," she said. "What they don't know is that portions of the Lower Peninsula (LP) and other rural parts of the state are even harder hit economically and in terms of employment."

Schools in the northeastern LP, she said, often have difficulty attracting and keeping skilled teachers, especially for subjects like math. Because the area is rural, teachers must travel long distances, ongoing education opportunities are limited, salaries are low (even for teachers, who are poorly paid in general), and technol-

ogy is no match for the bigger cities. It's a cycle, she says. If the teachers are poorly trained in math, the students will be also, and their job opportunities will suffer.

Part of Sister Ruth Ann's goal is to remedy that, and she has helped put programs in place that have enabled Michigan's math teachers to rise to new levels of learning and teaching expertise. Another part of her job — the most challenging — is to find the funding to make the programs reality.

The former chair of the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at Western Michigan University, Dr. Meyer (as the students and her colleagues address her) is since 1999 an emerita researcher and professor of mathematics at WMU. Through 2011 she is the principal investigator/project director of the Kalamazoo Area Algebra Project, a state math/science partnership project. She is currently completing a five-year term as principal investigator and project director of the Michigan Mathematics Rural Initiative Project. (Abbreviated and cleverly baptized with math-lovers' symbolism, it's popularly known as M²RI.)

Thanks to funding for the M²RI Project that Sister Ruth Ann was able to secure from the state and from a private foundation, the university's math department has partnered with 20 rural area school districts in Michigan's central and northeastern LP and regional science and math

One of Sister Ruth Ann's favorite projects is this year's Kalamazoo Area Algebra Project (KA²P, of course!); <http://wmich.edu/math/kaap/> The project provided four-day technology workshops for mathematics teachers of grades 6-12. Here (and on the cover) teachers huddle to explore the "bells and whistles" of new high-tech calculators.



Another result of her funding efforts, this hands-on learning experience energized and taught enhanced skills to the 111 teachers who participated.

Photos top, left and inset cover © Michael Lanka
Photography; courtesy of Western Michigan University.

centers to boost students' opportunities for learning.

The already successful rural area program recently changed its delivery format to an even more effective model in 2009-2010: Offering online learning opportunities for teachers by means of DVDs containing instructional modules, M²RI can better serve rural area teachers. Providing at least 21 hours of professional development for the math teachers, M²RI "has been a win-win for everyone," Sister Ruth Ann says. "It offers state-of-the-art continuing education to a wider base of teachers in low-income and underserved areas. It reduces travel time and cost for teachers. And they are then in a position to share their enhanced skills and the latest technology with their students." The project staff trained teacher leaders to facilitate the sessions, which included a DVD dinner/dialogue at local school districts.

That the educators enjoyed and benefited from the program is clear from a number of thank-you notes and letters Sister Ruth Ann received from the teachers and her colleagues alike.

A special education teacher in lower Michigan wrote: "Wow! I am having so much fun learning math with my colleagues. I love the hands-on activities, even the challenging ones... I want to express how much I appreciate this opportunity. There have been so many benefits. M²RI has definitely made me a better teacher... Our math department has become much closer. Thank you!... I really can't thank you enough."

On her curriculum vitae, Sister Ruth Ann's academic credentials, areas of graduate study, published articles in journals, books and monographs, and honors run to more than 20 pages. But for this veteran educator, what energizes her is helping people learn and giving them the tools to do that.

Attending grade school with her eight siblings in New Cleveland, Ohio, or Sts. Peter and Paul High School in Ottawa, Ohio, she never thought she'd have a Ph.D. in mathematics education or that it would be her life's work. But she admits math came easily to her.

Sister Ruth Ann shrugs off any suggestion that this is a difficult and specialized field. "Some people like English or art," she said, "I love math. I always have, ever since I was a child."

She knew she liked math, and she also knew she liked the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Her pastor tried to steer her toward another religious community, but she insisted on joining CPPS. "I told him they were 'more spiritual,'" she said.

One way she lives and shares that spiritual focus today is as chair of the



Photos page 1 left, page 6 and above by Pat Morrison

Sue Simons and Sister Ruth Ann take a break from work to catch up on news. Sue is the administrative assistant to the chair of WMU's mathematics department.

congregation's Maria Anna Brunner Fund. This fund provides short-term grants to worthwhile programs that benefit the poor, and women especially. "There are so many people doing great things," she said. "We can't help them all, but it's very satisfying to be able to empower them in a small, limited way."

Today, spirituality is more central to her life than ever. Before she heads to the busy WMU campus, Sister Ruth Ann begins her day with contemplative prayer. She attends Mass at a nearby parish after work, and closes her day with another period of prayer.

"Education is a strong part of our history as Sisters of the Precious Blood," she says as we cross a breezeway over the WMU campus. "I love what I do. I'm very grateful to the congregation for allowing me to get the education that has enabled me to do what I've been doing now for many years."