Voices of Sisters
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Religious Life



Jennifer Wilson poses on the occasion of her final vow celebration, Aug. 2, 2015, with her former students at Nativity-Miguel Middle School of Buffalo, New York. (Sisters of Mercy/Gary Lonki)



by Sr. Jennifer Wilson

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Recently, I saw a question on Facebook that asked: "What are the five words that you live by?" At first, I thought, "I do not have a quote that encompasses how I go about my days." I clicked on the comments and saw that people left all kinds of phrases and quotes. As I scrolled through them, the ring on my finger knocked against my phone with a sharp "click."

I had what I suppose could be called a "light bulb moment." The inscription inside that ring says, *Love never fails*. I was reminded that I do have a motto that I live by. A tradition of the Sisters of Mercy in my area is to have a ring motto. A motto is inscribed in the ring which is received by a sister during the Mass at her perpetual profession. The motto is usually something that comes from Scripture or is a saying or quote that is an expression of the sister's spirituality.

This week, Catholic Sisters Week was celebrated with a large social media presence by many communities of sisters. In honor of this week, I was considering sharing my ring motto and the video of my perpetual profession with my students. Before making final vows, I had been in what is called the "incorporation process" with the Sisters of Mercy for nine years. Five of those years were as a sister in temporary, or first, vows.

As I moved closer to making my final vows, choosing a motto was a way to have something that would encompass, in a few words, why I was ready to say *yes* to forever. I chose "Love never fails" from 1 Corinthians 13:8. Through my lens of faith, these words mean that the love I have for God and that God has for me will never fail.

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Since seeing that post on Facebook, I have reflected more thoroughly on the words engraved in my ring and what they mean in my life. In the New International Version of the Bible, the verses before *Love never fails* say, "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres." These words have helped to flesh out what *Love never fails* means to me.

The question I asked myself is: If I see God as love and I truly believe that God does not and will not fail me, then what does this mean for me when things happen in my

life that are hard, sad, and sometimes difficult to understand? During my time in religious life, I have come to understand that God's love is not the kind of love that is all wrapped up in a bow and given as the perfect present. But it is the kind of love that protects, hopes, trusts and perseveres.

Love that *protects* does not mean that I will not get sick or be in an accident or experience any other calamity that could occur. However, being a Sister of Mercy and living in community allows me to experience a kind of protection and caring from my community. When life gets impossibly busy, a kind community member will step in to help. The day-to-day routines, prayer, and conversation show me I am loved and cared about in a way that is tangible.

A love that *hopes* is shown to me in so many ways as a Sister of Mercy. My ministry is teaching high school theology and working as the diversity, inclusivity and equity coordinator at a Mercy academy. This gives me an opportunity to see hope among the students I teach. I see great hope for the future, as they grow into compassionate young women who will be future leaders. The lessons they are learning about the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy are not lessons they take lightly. These concerns having to do with the Earth, women, anti-racism, nonviolence and immigration are helping them to think about and act on issues that will still be present and important as they become adults. Recently, 20 students, our campus minister, and I attended the movie "Just Mercy". The reflection in which the students participated afterwards is an exact illustration of a love that hopes. Hearing them grapple with such a difficult issue and really wanting to understand past and current issues of racism brought tears to my eyes.

Love that *trusts* shows up in my life in many ways. A few months ago, I attended a meeting in Peru for Sisters of Mercy under 50. This meeting involved talking about the direction we would like the Sisters of Mercy to take as we move forward. Trust in who we are as younger sisters was so palpable that you could almost touch it. Listening to each other share about the ways we want to build healthy communities and continue to deepen the relationships among us showed me that our future as Sisters of Mercy will be full of challenge, love and hope.

Perseverance is present in my life on a minute-to-minute basis. I have come to realize that many moments in my day that I recognize as "God moments" are because of my perseverance. Conversations that I stayed in, work that I stuck with, often lead to moments where I can see the presence of God. That moment four and

a half years ago when I said my vows and gave myself forever to God and the Sisters of Mercy, was the best day of my life. The road that led me to making my vows that day was one of hope, trust and perseverance that allowed me to live out the call that God gave me. Slipping that ring on my finger, as a sign of my commitment to God and the Sisters of Mercy, was proof that *love never fails*.

[Jennifer Wilson is a member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Before entering the congregation, she completed two years as a Mercy Volunteer corps member in Guyana. Her graduate degree is in education and special education. She has worked with homeless women and children as a social worker and presently is a theology teacher and the diversity, inclusion and equity coordinator at Mount Mercy Academy in Buffalo, New York.]