News
Q&As



Sr. Laura Zelten, far right, smiles with her students at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay in Green Bay, Wisconsin, during a community service event. (Courtesy of Laura Zelten)



by Rachel Kettner

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March 19, 2024

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St. Francis of the Holy Cross Sr. Laura Zelten, felt the call to join a religious order at a young age. Her compassion and desire to serve others led her down the path to the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross. From living in a developing country to leading retreats for students in the U.S., her joy and love for God continuously drove her to put others before herself and draw them closer to Jesus and his love for them.

Nearly 50 years into her ministry, her teaching heart has led her to work with students of all ages, ranging from elementary school to university, nourishing their faith as well as their academics. She has no plans of slowing down and says each day is a blessing and an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of someone around her.

***Global Sisters Report*: What led you to be a religious sister?**

Zelten: I joined religious life just a year after graduating high school and have been a sister for 47 years. I researched four different religious communities in search of the one where I could best serve God's people. Those four orders were the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of St. Agnes, Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity and the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross. I wasn't too concerned about what I would do. I simply wanted to be a sister, live in community and share in the ministerial life of the community.

When I entered the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross, I knew it was the community that best fit my gifts and spirituality. I felt that the Franciscan way of life was for me. The way the community lived the charism of cross, word and Eucharist, being women of prayer, presence and hospitality, was what I imagined my life to be. The sisters were joyful. They served in parishes and were part of the people's lives. I loved to pray the Liturgy of the Hours with the community. When we prayed, it felt like we were connected with the universal church.

Did you ever doubt your call?

I don't believe I ever doubted my call. I did realize there would be a sacrifice in not giving birth to my own children, but I put that energy into serving others and being a good community member.



Sr. Laura Zelten, second from left, with her fellow Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross (Courtesy of Laura Zelten)

In what ways and locations have you served since becoming a religious sister?

My community attends St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin, to get their teaching license as part of formation when women join the order. When I completed my degree in elementary education, I taught first, second and third grades for eight years in the Diocese of Green Bay [Wisconsin], at St. Louis in Dyckesville, All Saints in Denmark and St. John's in Little Chute.

When I was serving at St. John's in Little Chute [Wisconsin], I was part of their Social Justice Committee. It was there that I felt a call to serve our brothers and sisters who live in poverty. The community had a mission in Muelle de los Bueyes, Nicaragua. After discerning with my spiritual director, community leadership and close friends and family, I left for Central America.

I spent eight years with the people of Muelle de los Bueyes. There wasn't really a daily routine. We were involved in the rural school program and formation of the catechists, health promoters and active members of the parish. My main ministry was working with the teachers in the rural school program. I spent time visiting the schools in the bush communities. At that time, there were no roads and all my transportation was done by horse or mule. I stayed with the teacher's family while visiting.

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Returning home, I served our Hispanic brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Green Bay. I loved working with the congregation in their celebrations, especially the important moments of family life. Many were the first generation in the United States, and to journey with them through both hard times and good times as they assimilated into society was an honor and a privilege.

My religious community then asked me if I would be willing to serve as our vocation director. To be able to discern with women who were searching for their call in life was humbling. I felt that prayer was an essential part of this ministry. I prayed for the women I was journeying with and prayed for our community to accept others to join us. I felt honored to share my community's story with others who were discovering how God was calling them.

I continued my education and did postgraduate work in theological studies, earned from St. Norbert College [De Pere, Wisconsin]. This opened the door for me to teach high school theology and eventually serve as the campus minister in high schools and at the university level. It is a blessing and joy to serve young adults, journeying with them as they figure out where God is calling them or introducing them to Jesus, their friend.



Sr. Laura Zelten poses with the Phoenix, the school mascot of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, where she serves as the campus minister for the UWGB Catholic Community and Newman Club. (Courtesy of Laura Zelten)

What has been the most powerful experience during your time as a religious sister?

The most powerful experience I have had as a sister continues to be being a part of the lives of those I serve. I feel that each of my ministerial experiences was special

and powerful in its own way. Whether I was teaching young children, working with the rural communities in Nicaragua, vocation ministry or high school and university campus ministry, all were about walking with others and helping to grow their relationship with Jesus and being a disciple, sharing that love with the world.

What is your current apostolate?

I am in my eighth year of ministry as the director of campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

My favorite aspects of campus ministry are leading retreats and going on mission trips. In leading retreats, I can hear the stories of how faith is changing the way young adults see themselves. Leading mission trips, I see how young adults can change the world. Seeing students take what they have learned and share it with the world brings me deep joy.

My hope for campus ministry is that we can continue to form young adults who are serious about growing in their relationship with Jesus, take an active role in the life of our church and want to be missionary disciples sharing God's love wherever they are.