



Rosalie Durante, FS

SPIRITSONG

Welcome to the second issue of "SpiritSong", the official publication of the Fiat Spiritus Community sent to the members of the Spiritual Family of Catherine.

Our hope is that our stories in this publication will reveal the ways in which we live our expression of the charism.

In this issue we feature two members of our community who share a brief story of how the Charism of Catherine animates their life and ministry.

Ministry: How My Work Expresses the Charism of Mary Katherine Kasper Rosalie Durante, FS

I do the work of a psychologist in a women's maximum/medium security prison. My areas of expertise, training, & experience are focused on working with women who have committed sex offenses, women with all varieties of mental disorders and medical illnesses, risk assessment, and providing direct group & individual psychotherapy services in a variety of modalities ("talk" therapy and expressive therapies). I have been employed within the department of corrections for almost 12 years, the last 7 working exclusively within the women's prison. This is my ministry. It is, of course, the work for which I am paid and it is how I financially support myself. It can be honest work, focusing on the integrity of each human being I come in contact with (inmate as well as all levels of staff members) and I have set this as my goal. It is work which forces me to see, really see, and know the wide variety of possible human behaviors and attempt to come to terms with a reality which is complex, often-times dangerous, and requiring difficult decisions related to protecting individuals and the community. This is work which requires advocacy and tremendous common sense coupled with an understanding of research and the ways to apply the available resources, solid science, and one's faith and beliefs in the service of humankind. This work challenges me each and every day. For me, it is not possible without the foundation of my faith as exemplified by the example of Mary Katherine Kasper.

A Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ sister explained it to me in this way:

"Katherine loved God's people and she served them in a practical way. Your job is to do the same." This provides a reason for me to be able to attempt my work. And it provides the guideline for how to do my work, challenging me to be not only professional, but first and foremost, a woman of integrity and faith. It would be easy to become cynical, jaded, and burned-out. It is sometimes hard to recognize what is beautiful and good. It is, for me, harder to realize that great harm is the capacity of some and great protection and perspective is necessary. I have always disliked people who talk about "doing prison ministry" yet remain naïve about who they are working with and unwilling to face the facts of someone's behaviors. I have seen people manipulated by people who have incredible skills in this area. And I have seen staff become less than professional as well as criminal. I have also witnessed tremendous caring and a capacity for transformation and change. I am all too aware that always, only God knows what is truly in the hearts and souls of the people I serve and those I work with and that I simply, do not know.

However, I can follow Katherine's example, as exemplified by her life, her followers, and her family, to attempt to be of service and do some good in my ministry. It is not just "work" that I do, but a calling I feel compelled to explore, to attempt, to try.

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*Freely responding to the Spirit...
with attentive ears, contented hearts and
joyful service.*

Ministry: How My Work expresses the Charism of Mary Katherine Kasper Rosalie Durante, FS ...continued

This work humbles me, whether or not I want to be humbled. I have had to learn about myself – the good and the bad parts of myself – and make many serious decisions about how I will and have chosen to live my life. I have always worked with people, as a part of my training as an art therapist, a substance abuse counselor, and now, as someone who can do the work of a psychologist – bringing to this work the best that I feel I have to offer, the example of a simple, yet complex woman who loves God and God's people and found that God's people were each and every one she served.

Prison work involves working with inmates and all of the staff necessary to run a prison. It provides me with the gift of a profession as well as many surprises. It has provided me with opportunities to question and examine everything I was ever taught or believed in. It has provided me with opportunities to question and examine everything I was ever taught or believed in.

I am stunned by the complexity of human beings and how truly small is my part in all of this. I also respect the tremendous capacity I have to impact another human being, just as I am impacted and changed by my experience each day. Without those words of explanation from the PHJC sister I quoted earlier, my ministry would not be possible.

I would be a well-meaning, but wholly ineffective, naïve “do-gooder” who cannot open her eyes to a reality that includes much human suffering as well as the possibility for transformation and change. Prison work, the work of a psychologist who happens to be working in a prison, a follower of Mary Katherine Kasper....this is my ministry. It is my small attempt to live the charism of “personal poverty and love for the poor, simplicity and humility and servant self-sacrifice to humankind.”

Rosalie Mary Durante, FS, Psy.D.
December 2008



Claudia Swarthout, FS

Living the Charism Through Teaching Claudia Swarthout, FS

It's 6:00 A.M. on a school day, and I know I better get up and going. After a quiet cup of coffee and a few moments to direct my day, I catch a few minutes of the news, give a kiss and a hug goodbye to Jimmy, my husband, and I'm out the door.

My weekday destination is a little school in Unit District 300 called Parkview Elementary, where I have taught for 13 years. There, I teach vocal music to students from Kindergarten through 4th grade. Situated in Carpentersville, Illinois, this little school is filled with students from a myriad of backgrounds and nationalities. Built in the 50's, it first serviced the children of World War II veterans. Since those days it has evolved into a school consisting of White, Hispanic, Black students, and even recent Polish immigrants. Hispanics have found a home in Carpentersville over the last 20 years, and our school population reflects that reality. Of the 18 classrooms in our

school, 8 are set up as Spanish bilingual. This means that these students are taught all content matter in Spanish. The educational premise for this is that if children can read and write in their native language, they have a greater chance at success in middle and upper grades as they transition into English. The school is also a Title I school which means that over 51% of students live below the poverty line. These children are entitled to free or reduced breakfast and lunch, and without this service, many would start their day hungry. Since taking vows and becoming a Fiat Spiritus member 5 years ago, my work at Parkview has not changed much, but what I bring to it has. I have found that my promise to be attentive to the Spirit of Christ and respond to the Spirit's guidance has deepened my commitment to the children and families I serve .

Living the Charism Through Teaching

Claudia Swarthout, FS cont.....

Bringing the heart and mind of Catherine Kasper to my work as a Fiat Spiritus Community member helps me to live out my gospel call to live simply, attentively, and with a singleness of heart. Though there have been many opportunities for me to transfer into newer, more suburban schools in my district, my vows have helped me to discern that the Lord calls me to serve where I am. To minister at Parkview is to serve not only as teacher but as mentor, councilor and sometimes parent to children who live with so much uncertainty. For parents and their children new to this country, it means welcoming the stranger, and helping them know that this is now their home. For students with mental or emotional disabilities, it means encouraging them and giving them opportunities to shine through song and dance. For children suffering the effects of divorce or economic hardship, it's helping them to know that they are of deep worth and are valued.

I am blessed to be able to contribute financially to my family through my ministry. But I reap far beyond the monetary earnings I receive.

These priceless benefits are paid to me daily, through a kindergartener's smile or unsolicited hug, when a 4th grader proudly plays a new recorder song on his or her own, or when I experience a 2nd grader's joy at completing a musical performance for their families. My ministry paycheck comes when students slip little hand-drawn pictures to me or thank you notes for no reason at all, or when they eagerly greet me when I encountered them outside the school setting.

It's not always easy for a "night person" like me to pull myself out of bed when it's still dark outside. But I know I have a good reason.

Claudia Swarthout, FS
December 2008

Reflection

From Thomas Merton—A Book of Hours

Edited By—Kathleen Deignan, CND, Sorin Books, 2007

When I speak of the contemplative life I do not mean the institutional cloistered life, the organized life of prayer. I am talking about a special dimension of inner discipline and experience, a certain integrity and fullness of personal development, which are not compatible with a purely external, alienated, busy existence. This does not mean that they are incompatible with action, with the creative work, with dedicated love. On the contrary, these all go together.

A certain depth of disciplined experience is a necessary ground for fruitful action. Without a more profound human understanding derived from exploration of inner ground of human existence,

love will tend to be superficial and deceptive. Traditionally, the ideas of prayer, meditation and contemplation have been associated with this deepening of one's personal life and this expansion of the capacity to understand and serve others.

*Contemplation in a World of Action,
Thomas Merton, Image Books, 1973*