

Sr. Carol Ann (Mary Samuel) Spencer, OP – 50 Year Jubilee

Sr. Carol Ann Spencer, OP, is celebrating her 50th Jubilee as a Dominican Sister of St. Mary of the Springs, Columbus, Ohio. Born in Somerset, Ohio, she attended grade and high schools in Newark, Ohio. “I had the Dominican Sisters throughout school, and the idea of becoming a Sister was in the back of my mind,” Sister says. “I think that every girl who goes through Catholic grade school or high school and is taught by Sisters certainly thinks about religious life. But I did not want to think seriously about religious life at the time. I certainly didn’t tell anyone or consider it seriously until after I graduated from high school.”

After graduation, Sr. Carol Ann was offered a scholarship to the College of St. Mary of the Springs College, but she opted to work as a bookkeeper because of her father’s illness. During the next year, her father recovered and was able to return to work. “About April of that year, I became aware that I was getting very comfortable in my job and that I had to do something about this idea of becoming a Sister which had been in the back of my mind for some time,” Sr. Carol Ann says. “Just at that time, Sr. Mary Helen Brown, a Dominican Sister who was very close to my family, came to Coshocton, Ohio, for just one year. She supported me in my decision and was there when I broke the news to my mother.

“My mother had come into the Church through Sister Mary Helen’s influence when I was in the fifth grade,” Sr. Carol Ann explains. “She took this announcement very hard, saying that this was one thing in Catholicism that she didn’t understand. She also felt that, by entering religious life, I wouldn’t have the chance to enjoy many of the social opportunities I had missed throughout high school because I needed to work and help the family during my father’s illness.”

In the end, the Mystery of God’s grace won out and, at the age of 18, Sister left the family she loved, and whom she had supported financially, to join the Dominican Sisters. “My mother has been the biggest influence on my life,” Sister says. “She was a wonderful mother who always put her family first. She held our family together during some difficult times. Her faithfulness throughout her life still speaks to me. I always had her support, even though she found my decision to enter religious life difficult.”

“I know our God to be very faithful and I have tried to respond to that faithfulness throughout my religious life,” Sr. Carol Ann says. “It also has been a gift to be part of so many lives, and to share the faith in so many ways. My ministry in spirituality also continues to nourish me and sustain me in my commitment to be a Dominican Sister. As I sit with others, I have the privilege of witnessing how God is working in their lives and to hold up their goodness, which, often, they do not see. It is an awesome ministry.”

Sr. Carol Ann holds a BA in English from the College of St. Mary of the Springs. She taught grade school in Pittsburgh before becoming principal of Seven Sorrows Grade

School in Middletown, Pennsylvania. After earning a master's degree in English Education from Duquesne University, she taught English and Religion in high schools in Columbus, Ohio, and in Braddock, Pennsylvania, and served as principal of St. Vincent Ferrer High School in New York City. She earned a second master's, this time in Religious Studies from Dayton University and began to minister as a pastoral associate in RCIA and Religious Education programs in Lancaster, in Columbus, and in Sunbury, where she worked at St. John Neumann Parish. She went on to earn a master's of Pastoral Studies from Loyola University in Chicago and certification from the Institute of Spiritual Leadership in Chicago.

Sister currently directs the Wellstreams Formation Program for spiritual directors. Sister is a spiritual director with the Spirituality Network in Columbus and gives retreats. She is also active in the Ministry of Welcome and Formation programs of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs.