

A Presence to God's People

an interview with Patricia Cushing, CSJ



“When studying the Word of God, you’ll never be led astray.” These apt words from Patricia Cushing, CSJ’s father were the “breadth of vision that was part of my upbringing,” recalls Patricia during a recent interview.

Patricia was born on April 4, 1946, in Quincy, MA, to Robert and Natalie Cushing. Concerning her childhood, Patricia said, “As a

family, we had a daily routine. We went to Mass, prayed the rosary, and my father would read the Scriptures every evening.” Patricia, the youngest of four children, continues to reflect and embody this upbringing. Her parents nurtured her love of liturgy and music, encouraged her education, and reinforced women’s rights. “In my family women could do anything.”

At age four, Patricia had declared she wanted to be a Maryknoll sister and a physician. But after attending St. Joseph Elementary School, Quincy, MA, and Fontbonne Academy, Milton, MA, through high school, she gravitated towards the Sisters of St. Joseph. As a child, Patricia participated in her church choir and continued her love of music at Fontbonne. Many of her close friends attended public school, so she felt enriched as a child, socializing without discrimination. Patricia recalls, “In 1959, when the nightly news reported that Pope John XXIII was convening an ecumenical council (Vatican II) my father said: ‘It’s about time!’ And so the seeds were sown that would shape part of my life in the field of liturgy, music, and ecumenical endeavors.”

Patricia entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1963, in the midst of Vatican II. She graduated from Regis College, Weston, MA, in 1968 with a BA in English Literature and a minor in French. Her first ministry was at St. John School, Canton, MA, teaching first grade, which she loved. “Here I also became part of the local ecumenical church programs,” she said. Not only does she love teaching, she thrives on learning. She attended Boston University from 1974-78 earning the degree of Master of Music in Vocal performance with a minor in church music. During the summers of the 70s, she studied liturgy and sacramental theology at BC.

Utilizing her education, Patricia taught at various diocesan schools, and led music programs beginning at Sacred Heart, Newton Center, MA. She continued taking classes in Liturgy and The Rites at St. John’s seminary. Her first full-time liturgy director position was at St. Augustine, Lawrence, MA. Here, she began writing bulletin inserts on the Sunday readings and Mass structure called “The Mystery of Faith.”

In 1984, Patricia was invited to become Director of Liturgy and Music for the Archdiocese of Kansas City, KS. She was one of only a few women to hold this position. Patricia said of the experience, “There were exciting times. The Archbishop and Liturgical Commission were wonderful to work with and fun. All gifts were welcome and utilized there.” During this time in Kansas, Patricia planned liturgical conventions, workshops, oversaw the taping of the Sunday Mass for television, wrote for the “Leaven,” was the director of both the Mid-America Liturgy and ecumenical liturgical program. “We taught and tended to the liturgical needs of the folks in the ‘heartland’ with a program we called *Plowing and Planting the Seed*, said Patricia. Her time in Kansas also afforded her the opportunity to present papers at the national and international level.

Patricia’s mother fell ill in 1987, so she returned to Massachusetts to be closer to her. She accepted a position as liturgist at Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, MA from 1987-89. There, she earned an advanced degree in Systematic Theology with a focus on liturgics. In 1989, Patricia said, “I accepted an invitation by Bishop Daniel Reilly, to be Director of Liturgy for the Diocese of Norwich, CT. During my eight-year tenure, I was blessed again with a fabulous Liturgical committee who endeavored to teach liturgy to all we could reach.” During this time, Patricia was an active member of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and the North American Academy of Liturgy.



Patricia with her parents, Robert and Natalie, in 1963 just prior to entering the Congregation.



Patricia introducing members of a four-State Liturgy Conference at the Georgetown Center, Washington, DC.

In 1997, Patricia returned to Kansas City, MO, as Director of Liturgy/Music for St Francis Xavier Parish and Rockhurst University where she prepared the liturgy, directed the choir and wrote bulletin inserts for the three-year liturgical cycle for the parish. This was a time of transition for her. "I felt I was being called by God into spirituality and healing. My childhood desire for healing resurfaced." In 2001, she took classes and earned National Certification in both Integrated Massage Therapy and Spiritual Direction. This path in spirituality and healing led her to found "The Dear Neighbor Center for Spirituality and Healing," a consortium of healers interested in bringing peace, wholeness, health, and balance to all who needed their care.

"Anything worth doing requires discipline, passion and a lens of possibility."

In 2009, Patricia returned home. "Coming home has had its challenges, but not without grace, and that is exciting. Now, I am a 'presence' at Bethany. I incorporate my healing, music, and teaching for the benefit of the residents." Presently, Patricia is conducting a monthly seminar on the Documents of Vatican II for the residents of BHCC and St. Joseph Hall. She feels, "This gives the residents a time to reflect on Vatican II and share its influence on their own lives."

About her life, Patricia reflects, "Anything worth doing requires discipline, passion and a lens of possibility. That is where the creative tension of the Spirit unfolds and empowers. Being attentive and aware of God's work in my life has kept me on the path, although circuitous at times. As a woman of the gospel, ministering through the lens of the CSJ charism, I am aware that God is running the show. God is the horizon; we view that reality only through a lens of possibility!"

Helen Halligan, CSJ - My life has been enhanced by the Vatican II documents. I found them easier to understand than the time-worn Réglements of the Council of Trent of 1545, which Catholics had been living by since the 16th Century.



Q: What about Vatican II has had the greatest impact on you?

A: *I feel John XXIII's vision and pastoral inclusivity to open the doors of the Church to the world, embracing all God's children, was Spirit driven. Our first and only reason to be on this earth, from my perspective, is to know who we are in relation to God and in service to all humanity without distinction. For me, this relationship with the Divine is nourished in the Church's liturgy, contemplation, and presence to God's people. †*