

Connections, Layers, Patterns – All is One

by Joanne Gallagher, CSJ



"All life is connected. I think in images. Where I've lived, the people I've lived with are a part of me. These connections are an important part of what enables me to be and do." With these words, Sister Ann Marie Grady captured the essence of the relationships that have shaped her life.

Sister Ann Marie, affectionately called "Anno" by friends, grew up in Medford and Somerville with her parents and sister, Mary Rita, who is also a Sister of St. Joseph. Their parents were actively involved in their local parish and enjoyed people. Both sisters attended Mount St. Joseph Academy. Sister Ann Marie entered the Congregation in 1957, two years after her sister, Mary Rita.

Sister Ann Marie attended Regis College, where she majored in Latin and Greek. The University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, the first place to offer advanced degrees in theology to women, is where Ann Marie earned her Masters of Arts in Theology with a focus on scripture. While in Toronto, she had the good fortune of being introduced to the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ. He wrote, ". . . the human person . . . must build - starting with the most natural territory of his [sic] own self - a work, an opus, into which something enters from all." He continued, "My self is given to me far more than it is formed by me."¹ Reflecting on this, Sister Ann Marie comments, "When you think about it, there's a lot that is given that we're simply responding to, and there are things that are beyond us, too."

In 1966, Sister Ann Marie began teaching theology at Regis College in Weston and Framingham. It was here that Sister Julia Ford introduced her to the overhead projector – remember those?! "I taught visually," Sister Ann Marie recalls. "I used transparencies to layer things. Perhaps my 'layered world' started back then."

Inspired by a presentation by Donis Dondis on "visual literacy" at Boston College in the 1970s, Sister Ann Marie began studying at Boston University to acquire a Masters in Educational Media and Technology. The degree enabled her to integrate visual literacy into teaching religious studies. "Try to imagine the technology of this era," Sister Ann Marie explains, "The video was a huge tape recorder carried on your shoulder. Everything was black and white. As technologies changed, I continued to incorporate more of it into teaching. Eventually, Regis created a darkroom, started a communication department, and I was asked to teach a course on visual literacy."

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Sister Ann Marie continued, "One course at BU was titled: "A systems approach to the design of a mediated curriculum" – really! What I discovered was that I had been telling students the connections they needed. I came to recognize the only skill this required was to memorize what I suggested. Suddenly everything changed as I realized they needed to make the connections themselves. Until the 1990s, I had taught in both the theology and communication departments. When the president of Regis asked me to put my energies into one area, I chose communication. What I love about the visual is that it's always new. You cannot use solutions from yesterday, you need the skills that allow you to respond to tomorrow or wherever you're at now. You go out as an explorer."

In 1977, Regis College was celebrating its 50th Anniversary. Sister Ann Marie was part of a group that collaborated to create a multi-media presentation. The show was multi-image in the style of “Where’s Boston?” The group called themselves MACJEM Productions² – this came from the first letter of each committee member’s name! It celebrated Regis College’s heritage.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, in response to a request from the president, Sheila Megley, RSM, Sister Ann Marie and Sister Judith Costello created programs for Regis’s Annual St. Joseph Day celebration. With the assistance of a Kaneb Grant, the sisters traveled to the archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Lyon and LePuy, France. With design assistance from Michelle Barczykowski, an exhibit celebrating 350 years of the Sisters of St. Joseph was created.³

The opportunity for sabbaticals was an important opportunity to adapt and grow. For Sister Ann Marie’s first sabbatical, she photographed two deaf and blind students at The Perkins School. “It made me so aware of what light does,” she said. In 1994, she created an art exhibit titled “Layered Worlds: The Look of Alzheimer’s.” Sister Ann Marie’s mother had lived with Alzheimer’s for about ten years. Sister wanted to make a visual statement that might impact views and influence legislation that would provide more funding for research and find new solutions for diseases.⁴

A few years ago, Sister Ann Marie retired after 42 years at Regis College. She approaches retirement with a broad vision of “a time of life that gives you the time to do things you couldn’t do when working full-time.” A few of her “retirement” activities include visiting our sisters at Bethany Health Care Center and designing a book that joined photography with haiku by Sister Frances Agnes Blake, a resident of Bethany. She serves on the board of the Spellman Museum of Stamps & Postal History and offers workshops in photography to the New England Communicators for Women Religious. Sister Ann Marie helps small organizations design logos and is currently working on a project with Sister Cathy Clifford to share the CSJ spirit with Marian High School parents.

For Sister Ann Marie, each day is new. “Self, others, the world, God – all is connected. If you bump into one, you bump into all. Connections, layers, patterns are a part of life. We discover patterns that recur in nature. Do these not echo the patterns of our lives – love and joy, sorrow and loss, support and friendship? What do we discover each day?” †

¹Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, *The Divine Milieu An Essay on the Interior Life*, © Perennial Classics, 2001 first published 1957, pg 77, 66

²MACJEM: Margaret William McCarthy, csj, Ann Grady, csj, Catherine Meade, csj, Joan Murray, Edwina Hughes, Marie deSales Dinneen, csj.

³Materials from this exhibit are displayed on the walls of the main corridor of College Hall at Regis College.

⁴Some images from that exhibit are displayed at the office of the Alzheimer’s Association in Watertown, MA.

