

blossomed. Themes that encouraged growth: Scripture study, return to the charism of Francis and Clare, personal decision-making, personhood, self-worth, healing the wounds of the inner child.

Sister Gretchen, a woman of faith, was a steady presence... unwavering in her trust in God and imbued with confidence in the teaching of Vatican II, which had begun for her in Peru. Her love of her Sisters and their Franciscan way of life was most evident at this time of uncertainty. Sisters have said, "She brought us to a new level of living." "She led us into a new age." "She knew how to celebrate and bring joy to the moment." Sister Gretchen's intense energy was too much for some and life-giving for others. In this time of transformation she gracefully accepted her own pain and suffering.

Gretchen carried her authority lightly. Once out of office she didn't refer to herself as president, but "when I was in the office of president." She knew what she was about. Gretchen guided the congregation through many changes: discernment vs. assignments; General Assembly; authentic humanness as it strengthens faith; realistic budgets for Sisters in schools; addressing subtle forms of injustice existing within the shared life of the Congregation; the beginning of the Franciscan Federation, regional meetings of LCWR and the feminist movement.

This "larger than life" woman was given to us. She carried the burden of dissent, fear and division with trust and hope. Her magnanimity held each Sister and invited each to find and believe in her potential. Gretchen believed that was the way to the will of God and the deepest relationship with God.

At Assisi Heights, Gretchen found her "minores way" to live out her Franciscan commitment. Her ministries included: delivering a newspaper or a banana to a Sister; feeding the fish; buying treats to give away; befriending and affirming anyone who came her way. Her contemplative life of prayer, her love of Clare gave her the clarity and intensity of trusting life experiences. Her sadness was never completing the book on Clare's mirror image of Jesus. "It is what it is" was her mantra.

In her years in health care her caregivers, especially Sister Martha, experienced her presence through a smile, wink, "sure", "you betcha", "alleluia", "yeah" or the look that penetrated to the heart expressing her deep gratitude for them. Her nephew Tony said, "What we see now is her soul. When I'm at this stage of life, I hope I'm like her."

If each person were to share the story of how Sister Gretchen touched her or his life, those would be myriad and different. Gretchen, the chorus of angels here on earth are grateful for all the ways you shared your abundance. Your legacy lives on in us. You, your loving spirit, your inspiration and your wisdom will be missed, faithful friend.

*Submitted by Sisters Monessa Overby and Joyce Stemper*