

Former SJA Teachers and Alumnae Remember . . .

The name of (St.) Carolyn Weibeler, BVM, whose first teaching assignment was at SJA, came up often. Alice Powers was especially close to her during her years at SJA. **BVM Joanne Simonini (Lisbeth)** (SJA class of 1949) regarded Carolyn as both teacher and friend. “She wrote a letter of reference for me when I applied for entrance to the community,” says Joanne. Moreover, **Pat Taylor, BVM (Wilbur)** (SJA class of 1948) says, “Sister Carolyn was the primary reason I am a BVM today.”

“I loved living and teaching at SJA from 1966–69. The community of sisters was a happy, loving, spirited group,” says **Mary Elaine Waddell, BVM (Valerie)**.

“SJA was my first teaching assignment; I loved the girls there and they were conscientious students,” says **BVM Helen Gourlay (Frances Helen)**.

Nancy McCarthy, BVM (Josephine Mary) shares, “I was privileged to teach at SJA for the final four years that the school was open (1968–72). It was a wonderful experience to share the deep traditions and general spirit with all the students and faculty at this ‘BVM school’ I’d heard so much about. The girls were such eager students—eager to learn about all the important things in life, as well as the material in textbooks. The bonds between sisters and students were very strong. My French students were truly a gift, and I especially appreciated the ones who made the ‘transition’ to Dowling High School with me (where I stayed for eight more years).”

Marie Greaney, BVM (David Therese) remembers, “My first mission was the preschool that was built next to SJA during the Second World War. Some of the students from the high school would come to help us serve lunch to the children in the preschool.”

BVM Judith Dewell (John Marie) is enthusiastic about her years at SJA. “My days at SJA in Des Moines (1965–69) teaching primarily music were wonderful days filled with challenge, great students and fantastic colleagues. I found the students to be especially hard working and talented—and a delight to teach. I loved the BVM community, who were dynamic, creative and fun to be and work with. It was the tradition to put on concerts, musicals and plays and I was blessed to have ‘all hands on deck’ to assist, which I especially appreciated. SJA was my first teaching assignment and though I was enthusiastic, I was lacking in experience and knowledge! Great days at SJA!”

Outreach work and social justice were part of the BVM “curriculum” long before those words became catch phrases of today. “What I recall most clearly is work by Margaret Mary Prussing, BVM (Evangelista),” says **Diane Forster, BVM**. “She organized a program called Social Action Leaders for Tomorrow (SALT), aka ‘Salt-teens.’ Students heard speakers, participated in on- and off-campus activities, including visiting nursing homes, families, care centers, food banks, and other service entities, involving them directly with people in need. Margaret Mary’s efforts would have long-lasting effects, influencing some students’ choice of career and avenues of volunteering throughout their lives.”

“In the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s, the insights and invitations of Vatican II shaped our teaching, for example—a religion course on ecumenism, our school and class liturgies, and our heightened awareness of the needs of a rapidly changing world. Navigating the closure of SJA (1972) and transition to a larger, co-ed school also stretched us all with life lessons of openness to change, flexibility and the importance of a faith community,” says **Mira Mosle, BVM**.

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