# Interview with Sister Sue

A conversation with Sandra about campus ministry, faith, community and a new chapter

**Sandra:** We posted an announcement on our Diocesan media that you were returning to your religious community after being elected as a Councillor and member of your Congregation's leadership team. It was short, and I wanted to share a little bit more about your years of service within our diocese.

**Sister Sue:** Thank you for doing this.

**Sandra:** What is the single most rewarding memory you have from your time as Campus Minister at UPEI?

**Sister Sue:** Whoa, single most rewarding.

**Sandra:** Is there a single?

**Sister Sue:** There would be a litany!

**Sandra:** Right answer!

**Sister Sue:** I mean the people. The gift, of well, I have to say that the trust that this university community has placed in me and I think it has developed overtime. I came in 2010, Father Charlie's shadow, he cast a big shadow for a tall thin man. It's just the trust that people have placed in me is overwhelming, it's just a gift.

**Sandra:** So, it's the memories, the relationships, and had you anticipated that before you came?

**Sister Sue:** No, I didn't, and you know what, that's a great question because as I go forward from here, I really don't know what I'm stepping into. When I came here, I didn't know what I was stepping into. My line was, I was a happy high school teacher. I had no clue about this world, this population. So, in a sense, it's kind of comforting as I go forward because I have no clue what I'm going to again, but I do believe God acts in our experiences and in our past experiences. The past, I mean, it doesn't lock me into the future, but it gives me a guideline to the future.

**Sandra:** How have university students spiritual needs changed since you began your ministry?

**Sister Sue:** I think a few things come to mind when I hear your question. One, is that the population here has changed, in terms of faith and spirituality, we're probably about the same number of students that we were. I do think the fact that when Father Charlie was here there was a small Muslim community that would pray on Friday, well now that's a big Muslim community that prays on Friday. They used to be over in the corner of the building, well then, they had a room, and there were men, and there were very few women, and then the women came and now like it's a bigger room. So, I do think we get, I get more how to be interfaith, how to continue to respond in an interfaith. How do we

continue to create space, so the Blessed Sacrament stays - we're not taking the Blessed Sacrament away, even when I go, I have the commitment of the university, commitment from the Diocese, to maintain a Catholic presence on campus. The Blessed Sacrament stays and the Muslims stay.

**Sandra:** We've all had those special leaders, and would you say Father Charlie kind of illuminated your gifts?

**Sister Sue:** I did have that one year with him. I say I had the best on the job training anybody could imagine. He's such an icon. I said to some people, I had coffee at a meeting this morning, and I said I think Father Charlie walked on water, and then they laughed, and I did say now I turned the water into wine. And that's the image, you know, because I recognize that I have offered UPEI a gift, and partly the gift that I received from the Diocese to be here, which means Saint Dunstan's is involved, the Saint Dunstan's University Board of Governors, it's that kind of lineage. It's to remember that and to tell that story, and as a people of the oral tradition, how do we continue to tell that story, so the Blessed Sacrament, the Catholic Student Association, as well as the Muslim students, as well as the Hindu students, as well as the Indigenous students.

**Sandra:** Can you share a moment when you witnessed a student experience a profound spiritual breakthrough?

**Sister Sue:** Well unfortunately the ones that are coming to mind are when we've been a grieving community, and when people just don't have the words to put on their grief, and yet they find community, and yet they find silence and a lit candle comforting. When they find the rituals that I would bring as a Catholic person, that they find comfort and consolation in that. I'm not sure they would name it as a spiritual breakthrough, but I sure would, that where God's infinite mercy has touched their lives. I think of those tragedy moments. I'm very aware that I'm Catholic, and I've often said my little box is a Catholic box, and my box bumps up against every other box on this campus. My root, my tradition, would be through Christ our Lord, Amen, or in the name of the Father, and the Son, or maybe a litany of a couple of Saints, but that's not everybody's tradition. So that's a me thing, it's over here, and when I'm with the Catholic students, I do that, but when I'm invited to be with other students, it's a different moment.

**Sandra:** It's a different moment, but that you're still bumping up against their box, and that you're still open, and they are, and that you bridge.

**Sister Sue:** Bridge is a great word. I think I've been a bridge.

**Sandra:** What did you find was the most effective way to connect with students who felt distant from the Church?

**Sister Sue:** Get out of this building, to have me at a soccer game, to have me at a basketball game, at a hockey game, at a rugby, whatever, and to get out of this building. Or even this morning, I had a meeting with somebody, and we met at the campus café. Like to get out of this building, I think this is true for Church anywhere. If we want if we want young adults, who's my population, to respond, then

we need to go where they are.

**Sandra:** What are you most looking forward to as you transition back into your religious community?

**Sister Sue:** It's breaking my heart. I mean, I'm moving back to Montreal. My mom, my family is from Ottawa, so I'll be closer to my family, which is lovely. Like there's transition and change in my community too, and I've been asked to be a part of helping facilitate those changes, and so that will be exciting. I live by myself here, and I'm connected to another house, a local community, but I will be living in community, I will be living with other sisters, which is a gift.

**Sandra:** How long has that been for you?

**Sister Sue:** That I have not lived with others?

**Sandra:** And lived in religious community, has it been a while?

**Sister Sue:** Yeah, and when I first moved to the Island, I lived in Notre-Dame. Then the scheduling for this ministry and their prayers, meals, I found it very challenging. So, I asked, and we rented a house, and there was another sister that lived at me for a couple of years. Then when the sisters moved from Notre-Dame up to Andrews, I ended up living by myself. So, maybe 10 years I've been alone.

**Sandra:** Do you miss that community life?

**Sister Sue:** There are days when my calendar is so hectic I just want to go home and not see anybody. I do quite appreciate my mornings of not having to greet somebody at the coffee pot.

**Sandra:** So, there will be some growing.

**Sister Sue:** There will be, there will be, and yet the women, because I'm from that part of the world, those women were part of my growing up in the community. The women down here I didn't know until I came in 2010, so it was a learning, you know, for even to have the CNDness of us. So, I'm going back to an area, I mean I entered in Ottawa, I'm going a little bit back to not only my roots but also the roots of my congregation, so that's exciting. Yet we're also changing religious life, we're changing our structures, so what was is not what will be.

**Sandra:** Right, and will you have a hand then in what will be?

**Sister Sue:** 100%, that's why I got elected to that level of governance in our congregation. So, we certainly, the chapter you know, endorses the movement of the Spirit and then we elect women to help us make it a reality. So, it's a five-year mandate, so by 2031, hopefully, the congregation will have moved in our own transformation process to better respond to the mission needs of the world in the Church.

**Sandra:** How can the Catholic faithful of the Island and the UPEI university community continue to support and pray for you during this transition?

**Sister Sue:** Oh, critical. When I got asked, so at the election they come at you with a microphone right away and they say, “Do you accept the results in the election,” and I heard myself say, I mean I was emotional, a lump in my throat, maybe a bit weepy, I heard myself say, “With God’s grace and with your prayers.” And I do think that goes for the sisters that were present in the chapter hall, that goes for the faithful here, that goes for the people, whether people pray or not, it’s their positive energy and good thoughts. I’ve had several invitations to come back, will I visit, will I be around, and I just think it’s that ongoing connecting. I do hope to come back.

**Sandra:** I’m so grateful for your time, Sister Sue.

**Sister Sue:** Thanks, Sandra. My goodness, your questions are good!

We thank Sister Sue for her faithful service and wish her God’s continued blessings as she begins this new chapter.