

A MINISTRY OF TEACHING, CARING AND SONG



Sister Marie Roccapriore M.A. '96, D.Min. '99 is a member of the Order of Religious Teachers Filippini, Villa Walsh, Morristown, New Jersey, and her diverse ministry vividly reflects both commitment to and effectiveness in educating and inspiring Christians to care for one another. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sister Marie was an elementary school teacher in New Jersey, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, and from 1966 to 1978, was principal of St. Nicholas of Tolentine School in Philadelphia. Sister Marie then turned to parish ministry and direction of Christian education programs at parishes in Cheshire and North Haven, before coming to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in Meriden in 1993. There she began two programs of pastoral care that would transform not only those in need within the parishes she served, but so many beyond them.

The first program was “Homebound Encouraged through Assistance in Love” (HEAL), based on Sister Marie’s conviction that the spiritual needs of the infirm, elderly and shut-in do not necessarily have to be met by highly trained special-

ists in pastoral care, but by empowering ordinary people of faith to embrace and use their natural compassion and concern in service to this population — for the transformation of both. When she was appointed as Director of Ministry to the Sick and Elderly for St. Thomas Church in Southington in 1998, the HEAL program continued, and became the foundation for her Doctor of Ministry project at Hartford Seminary. That work was later published in 2003 by Twenty-Third Publications as *Caring for the Sick and Elderly: A Parish Guide*, widely read, still in print and available. Sister Marie explains her approach in the introduction: “By sharing time with the sick and elderly — extending a compassionate hand, a prayerful heart, loving eyes, and sensitive ears — other people can bring to them the face of the healing Christ and help to make a significant difference in their lives.”

The second program Sister Marie developed while at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, which continues and thrives to this day, is “Spirit Joy Children’s Music Ministry,” which empowers young people to reach out to the sick and elderly through music. Children of all ages, from various parishes, diverse backgrounds and many cities in Connecticut gather twice monthly “to praise God in song and fellowship in preparation for their ministry involvement. They perform in nursing homes, hospitals, parishes and health-care facilities.” Teaming up with internationally known musician Jose Feliciano and his wife Susan, Spirit Joy now has produced three albums of songs, composed by Sister Marie, and so is heard around the country and world. A *Spirit Joy Melody and Lyrics Book* has also been published, and the children of Spirit Joy often appear on the Archdiocese’s television mass on Channel 20 WTXN in Prospect.

As both these programs of pastoral

outreach were very much a part of Sister Marie’s ministry during her time at Hartford Seminary, in both the Masters and Doctoral programs, she writes, “I am filled with wonderful memories and blessed experiences. Although I was the only Roman Catholic Sister in the doctoral program with several ministers of diverse traditions, I was comfortable with my surroundings and gained a great deal spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally.”

In particular, Sister Marie fondly recalls “my special mentor, Sister Miriam Therese Winter, who was an enormous influence in my continued music ministry with children. She left a strong impact upon me that continues to motivate me today with Spirit Joy Children’s Music Ministry. I will always be grateful for all the positive benefits of my education at Hartford Seminary. I pray that blessings in abundance surround Hartford Seminary and the staff.”