

# Sister Alice Retzner remembered for focus on serving people

BY MARGARET GABRIEL

“Sister Alice Retzner passed peacefully into the arms of her loving God this afternoon. We rejoice in that she has received her eternal reward and has been set free from her earthly body. ... We are all better for having known her and experienced her infectious joy and zest for life.”



A host of people who live and work in central and eastern Kentucky received this message on Feb. 6 from Sister Susan Marie Pleiss, a member of Sister Retzner's order, the Sisters of Saint Francis, Oldenburg, Indiana.

After beginning ministry as a teacher in Cincinnati, Sister Retzner felt called to serve the poor in Indiana, Montana, Missouri, New Mexico and Kentucky.

She began her ministry in eastern Kentucky in 1995 and for 20 years served as the pastoral associate at Queen of All Saints in Beattyville and then in Campton until she retired in until 2017. She was active in several groups of people in ministry in eastern Kentucky, including the local chapter of Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA). Her friends describe her as someone who caught the spirit of God through the people she served.

Although CCA focused on the identifying and combatting systemic issues of injustice throughout the 13 states that make up the Appalachian region, Sister Retzner's ministry focused on service to the people of Beattyville and later Campton. Her time in a thrift store, for example, gave her the opportunity to meet and develop friendships with many people in Lee County.

The story about Sister Alice on the website of her religious order includes her own reflection about the people she served: “The people I have ministered with have also ministered to me by welcoming into their lives and homes. Living in many different parts of the country, in the grandeur of mountains, desert, rolling hills, etc., I have come to see the great beauty of creativity in our Creator.”

Sister Pleiss and Sister Robbie Pentecost, also a Sister of Saint Francis, Oldenburg, both served their first mission placements with Sister Retzner.

“I met her when she was working in the inner-city in Indianapolis,” Sister Pentecost said. With two seminarians, Sister Pentecost worked that the summer knocking on doors, doing an assessment of the neighborhood.

“I don't even remember what the assessment was about, but Alice understood that ministry begins by getting to know the people.”

In Lee County, Sister Retzner held leadership positions in the ministerial association and Habitat for Humanity. “She helped people become more open and welcoming,” Sister Pentecost said. “Alice was inspired and genuinely influenced by the faith of others.”

Franciscan (Tiffin) Sister Marge Eilerman, a pastoral associate at Holy Family Church in Booneville, Ky., described Sister Retzner as someone who loved and care for the poor and also had the gift of being a good organizer.

As a “farm girl” from Indiana, Sister Pentecost said, Sister Retzner had a love and reverence for creation and related to the spirituality of the native Americans with whom she lived in Montana and New Mexico, finding compatibility with those faith traditions and Christianity. She often spoke of the gifts she gained from the Navajo and Crow people she served “Each morning I lift my eyes and heart to the East and give thanks for the gift of a new day and open myself to the blessings of that day.” Sister Retzner continued to lift her eyes to the East every morning, even as she battled Lou Gehrig's Disease during the final year of her life.

Visitation for Sister Retzner will be held Holy Family Church, Oldenburg, Ind., from 1-3 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 14. Funeral services follow at 3 p.m. with Rev. Lawrence Abler, O.F.M. Capuchin, officiating, with burial in the convent cemetery. Memorials may be made to the Sisters of St. Francis, P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, Indiana, 47036 ([www.OldenburgFranciscans.org](http://www.OldenburgFranciscans.org)).