

Diocesan News

Celebrating 101 years of service

By Lisa Bourne
Mirror Staff

Two biological sisters, who are also members of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary, will celebrate a combined 101 years in religious life this weekend.

Humility Sisters Jeanie and Elaine Hagedorn are set to commemorate 51 and 50 years respectively at an event on Oct. 20. They'll have a Mass of thanksgiving at Holy Trinity Church at 2 p.m. All are invited.

Credit their upbringing

With three years and another sister, Mary Jo Reed, between them, the Hagedorns' upbringing had a hand in inspiring them to religious life.

Elaine, Jeanie and their sister attended St. John Grade School and St. Joseph Academy in Des Moines.

The Hagedorns were impressed with the Sisters of Blessed Virgin Mary, also known as the BVMs, who served St. John's. The BVMs seemed to identify with the working poor.

Jeanie and Elaine Hagedorn credit their parents with instilling a deep faith in their lives. Their father, who was not Catholic, made sacrifices because of the importance of faith to their mother.

"In fact he was the one who would sit with us to work on our catechism studies," Jeanie said.

The Hagedorns' father was baptized into the Catholic Church in 1963.

Joining the religious

The mindset of one "giving a child up" in service to the Church would have been common when the Hagedorns were young as was a misunderstanding of religious life.

When Jeanie announced that she wanted to enter a religious community, her parents were apprehensive, thinking that their daughter would be lonely.

"This whole life, it was a notion of being locked up," Jeanie said. "We struggled."

Ultimately, she joined the Humility sisters.

After seeing Jeanie during their first visit, her parents relaxed.

"They could see how happy I was, that's all it took," she said.

This paved the way for Elaine, who is the older sister, to make the same choice one year later.

Teaching, parish ministry

Elaine had been involved in social issues for some time, and eventually determined that her passion was a religious vocation.

Jeanie felt drawn to teaching, something else she picked up from the BVMs.

After graduating from Marycrest College in Davenport, they went on to teach, Jeanie for 28 years and Elaine for 11. They served in Catholic schools in the Dioceses of Davenport, Dubuque, Rock Island, Ill. and

Des Moines.

In the Des Moines diocese, Jeanie taught at St. Anthony School in Des Moines and St. Pius X School in Urbandale. During her teaching years, she was also known as "Sister Marilyn Jean." Elaine taught at the then-St. Patrick School in Dunlap and at St. Joseph School in Des Moines. She was also a principal in Marshalltown.

Jeanie received a master's degree in religious studies from Seattle University and worked for 14 years in religious education administration.

Elaine moved into pastoral ministry and religious education administration after teaching, and completed 30 years of service at Visitation Parish, now Our Lady of the Americas Parish, in Des Moines, where Jeanie served as well for nine years.

Current ministries

Elaine continues pastoral ministry for Our Lady of the Americas Parish on a volunteer basis, mostly ministering to the elderly and homebound.

She also prepares wakes and funerals, takes people out to eat and to doctor appointments.

"I joke that maybe they could have a 'rent-a-nun,' because she's very good," said Jeanie.

Jeanie is the Peace and Justice Coordinator for the Humility sisters and teaches English as a Second Language classes at Des Moines Area Community College.

Jeanie and Elaine Hagedorn have become fixtures at local peace rallies.

Both sisters continue their work in a variety of social causes and organizations.

Changes in religious life

There is a marked difference in religious life between when the Hagedorn sisters entered the Humility sisters' community some 50 years ago and now.

"Rules were pretty strict at the time," Jeanie said.

The girls couldn't go home for the first four years in the community, and they could receive only four visits a year. They attribute this to an effort to keep novices focused on formation.

"When we look back now, we think this was sometimes harder on our family than us," said Jeanie.

They had to get permission for everything, including such things as making doctor appointments, and they never went anywhere alone.

It was the Second Vatican Council that the sisters say brought the direction of their community back to its original intent, leading to renewed focus on being part of society as it is today.

For them, the best change was being allowed to choose how to be of service, enabling them to best use their talents.

Sisters together

The Hagedorn sisters have lived together for the last 35 years. It might cause wonder as to how they get along after living together for so long.



Sister Elaine Hagedorn ministers to the homebound (left) while Sister Jeanie Hagedorn teaches English as a Second Language classes (right).



"As long as I'm the boss everything's fine," Elaine said.

"I let her think she's in charge, and everything's fine," said Jeanie.

"We have the same priorities. Peace and justice, care for the earth, family and faith," Jeanie added. "The basics we share."

What are their feelings as they approach their jubilee?

"Deep gratitude to God, and to family and community," said Elaine. "Just tremendous gratitude. It's humbling, really humbling."

"I can just say, 'Amen,' to that," Jeanie said. "We have been very blessed."



Sisters Elaine and Jeanie Hagedorn entered the Sisters of Humility community one year apart in the 1950s. They are celebrating their golden jubilees together on Saturday at Holy Trinity Church in Des Moines at 2 p.m.



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