



Sister Susan Rakoczy grew up on the east side of Detroit, just outside of Hamtramck. She is the oldest of six children in a family of three boys and three girls.

She was taught by the Felician Sisters for grade school and then attended Girls Catholic Central, where she met the IHMs. Sister Sue attended Marygrove where she majored in history and also studied English and philosophy.

“Marygrove was the continuation of the very good education I had experienced in high school,” she notes. She entered the IHM community after graduating from Marygrove.

She felt a strong call of a religious vocation, but she also “entered religious life to be in a community in order to transform Church and society.” Vatican II had called all the baptized to holiness, so religious life was not a call to a special “holy” life.

Sister Sue started her ministry teaching in Monroe and Detroit area schools. During that time, she earned her master’s degree in spirituality from Fordham University. She then went to Catholic University to complete her doctorate in spirituality while working at the diocesan pastoral ministry center in Kansas City, Mo.

She credits Pope John Paul II on her next move: to West Africa. She saw the pope on television as he talked about the new Church in Africa, which piqued her desire to go. During six years in Ghana, Sister Sue led retreats, offered workshops and did spiritual direction at the Center for Spiritual Renewal in Kumasi. In 1989, she began ministry in South Africa, teaching at St Joseph’s Theological Institute. She has been in Africa for 35 years.

Her time in Africa has helped Sister Sue develop as a theologian. She has written books on cross-cultural spiritual direction, feminist theology, mysticism and social justice, women discernment, feminist theology and eco-feminism. Two events had major impacts on her life.

One was the ending of apartheid and the release of important apartheid struggle leaders from Robben Island. Later, she met Nelson Mandela, and he thanked her and other sisters for the Church’s opposition to apartheid. The second event was during the first democratic elections in 1994. She served as an election observer and saw South African black people vote for the first time.

Sister Sue has had many joys throughout her religious vocation, but she says that “Friendship and solidarity in the congregation,” has been one of the greatest. Because she has been in Africa for such a long time, she feels it has been a “gift of seeing life from two different perspectives.”

She is grateful for the support and trust she has felt from the community. Sister Sue's strong sense of being called has sustained her throughout her life. Her faith has deepened. "Faith is not certain. I prefer to think of it as times of light and darkness. Times of death and resurrection," she reflects.

