

Mary Ann (Gertrude) O’Kane

In our IHM Chapters, we discern the liberating mission of Jesus and strive to live it out in every area of our lives, especially in how we interact with others and serve the poor. The words, “What can I render to the Lord for his goodness to me?” in the song by Mary Fran Uicker, IHM, “Hymn of a Grateful Heart,” speak deeply to my heart and have long inspired my ministries. My ministry in Oklahoma City has been filled with love, gratitude and service. I moved there in 1995, and it became my home for nearly 30 years. My local community included Sister Kathy Olsen, Lois Pokorny and our beloved pets. With their love and support, I was able to serve in many ways.

From the beginning, I found great joy in caring for our pets and others’ pets. Their unconditional love touched my heart and through caring for them, I formed wonderful friendships with their owners, many of whom remain dear friends today.

My primary ministry was caring for residents with Alzheimer’s disease at Canterbury and Lakes Nursing Homes. I administered medications and assisted with personal care and activities. Love and patience became the heart of my service, and I always tried to treat each resident with dignity and respect. One resident once asked what they would do if I were not there. I reassured her that someone would always care for them. She replied that it would not be the same. In moments like that, I realized that I am truly a “caregiver,” and this embodies all that I am.

Later, I entered the Pastoral Care Program at Presbyterian Hospital and went on to serve as a chaplain at Mercy Hospital for 15 years. This ministry was both a grace and an honor. Patients and families shared their struggles and fears, and I learned the profound importance of listening with the heart. Sometimes a gentle hug or simply holding a hand offered the greatest comfort.

My final ministry in Oklahoma focused on serving unhoused people. I began by stocking a small food box at Sunnyside Diner. Over time, this effort became central to my life. I kept food in my car and garage and made frequent trips to the pantry.

I also worked with a local church serving the homeless and befriended a woman experiencing homelessness, trying in small ways to meet her needs.

After nearly three decades of ministry in Oklahoma, I have returned home to Monroe, where my journey first began. I am grateful for the circle of love and care that has surrounded me throughout my life in community. My song continues to be, “*What can I render to the Lord for his goodness to me?*” I am deeply thankful for the support of the IHM community and look forward to renewing friendships, forming new ones and finding ways to continue feeding the hungry and caring for those most in need.

