



Sisters in Ministry:

**Sister Bernadine Nash – Jewish Hospital,
Louisville, KY**

Good stories often have a few key ingredients like a pinch of friendship, a cup of faith, a dash of humor and, of course, a lively cook known as the storyteller. Sister Bernadine Nash loves serving up a good story about her travels and life as an Ursuline Sister, and they usually include many of those tasty ingredients.

"When I became a sister you just got a letter that said, "Dear Sister, You will teach in North Platte," Sister Bernadine said when we met with her at Jewish Hospital, where she now volunteers in ministry. "We used to get a dollar a day to live on. It's a good thing people were so kind and loving," she added, laughing.

"So many people gave us items for daily use. It was a good thing because I figured it out once, how much I made per child, and it wasn't much. In 1949, I taught my first class. It was a group of 51 fourth graders at Holy Spirit School in Louisville and that worked out to about three cents per child and one got in for free. We didn't have calculators back then and I wasn't about to try to calculate children into fractions!" She added with a big smile.

Sister Bernadine, who was once known as Sister Emmet, volunteers at Jewish Hospital in downtown Louisville. Each time she comes in she gets a list of patients who requested her or who may need to see her. Pastoral counseling is one of the most important and challenging services at any hospital. Sister Bernadine adeptly uses her skill to relate to others as a way to share God's love and help patients and their families face some of their most difficult times.

Her days of volunteering often take a

serious tone. One day she received a call from the hospital's public relations office asking if she would come down and visit with a man who was close to death.

"He was one of the first patients who received an artificial heart," Sister Bernadine said. "His priest couldn't make it down just yet so I talked with him and we prayed the 23rd Psalm.

"I remember thinking he looked so healthy that he couldn't be dying, but one side of the heart was giving out. The doctors asked if he wanted a new one but he said 'no.' He'd seen a grandchild born and that was all he'd wanted. It was enough. His family was so grateful, but I felt it was a blessing for them to allow me into their lives to help. They are a wonderful, loving family.

"I also remember that day because I asked Sister Adelaide if she'd say a prayer for him. She was the only one I saw before I left. She said she would."

"She is so dedicated," said Kathy Losche, a volunteer chaplain at Jewish Hospital. Kathy joined us for the interview at Sister Bernadine's request. "You will find her where ever the patient goes. She sticks with them through it all. Sometimes I have to encourage Sister Bernadine to take a break. She keeps going whether its bad weather or she doesn't feel well. She's just so dedicated."



Sr. Bernadine with Dr. Ruth Simons



Kathy and Sister Bernadine were connected long before they met at the hospital. Kathy attended St. Vincent de Paul in Louisville as a child. It wasn't until 35 years later that Kathy would learn her new friend of several years had actually been her principal.

"Your past catches up with you," Sister Bernadine said with a laugh.

Sister Bernadine taught school for 42 years and served as principal for 27 years. She later served as coordinator at the Ursuline Motherhouse for six years. Then, Audrey Larkin with Jewish Hospital approached Sister Martha Jacob about finding a volunteer to visit with the sick. Soon, the word filtered down to Sister Bernadine who answered the call. Now, 12 years later, she still visits with as many as 32 patients weekly.

"I remember one man whom I went to visit. I knocked on his door and said my name and told him I was a Catholic Sister. He said, 'the last thing I need is a nun.' I just smiled and said I knew he wasn't feeling good and said I'd pray the Our Father with him, so I did."

Sister Bernadine paused for a moment, smiled and then continued. "He was so apologetic and grateful afterwards. I told him I understood, he just didn't feel well and that



**Above: Sister Bernadine with Marsh Lucas.
Left: Sister Bernadine with Kathy Losch, Chaplain
Below: Sister Bernadine with Michael Koons, RN**

the next time I would trouble him, he'd be feeling better. I could tell it made him happy."

"She is so wonderful, a great woman," said Michael Koons, a registered nurse who works in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). "She's a very good person. These patients really take a liking to her. Because

of all the work we need to focus on for the health of the patients, sometimes individuals don't get the spiritual time and interaction they need. Sister gives them that, and they really do need and appreciate it."

Michael is one of the many people who greet Sister Bernadine as she gives us a tour of the hospital. She says "hello" to everyone she passes and hugs many of them. Each one has a different role at the hospital, and she is happy to come across each one of them.

"She brings a little happiness to each floor," said Marsh Lucas, another registered nurse.

"I just love Sister's energy and smile," said Ricky Jackson, a food worker who was delivering the afternoon meals. "She's such a good and kind and giving person. She makes my day!"

"She is very important," said Dr. Ruth Simons, who was working with two interns when we met her in the hallways of the hospital. "The patients tell me how much she means to them. All the volunteers are really important to them."

But Sister Bernadine quickly responded, saying she gets much more than she gives.

"It's meant my life. It has given me a renewal of my life and energy. It's so wonderful to meet so many different people and to be able to help them through Jesus and St. Angela. Sisters never retire they simply say, 'Here we are God, come get us.'"

The Best Medicine

If laughter is truly the best medicine, then Sister Bernadine is treating patients well. She shares great stories and told us about a time when Sister Jamesetta DeFelice taught singing in the 7th grade at St. Vincent de Paul. Sister Bernadine had accompanied her on a trip to the church with the children.

"On the way, one of her boys turns to me and says, 'We met a priest and his name is Father Arf Arf! I had to hold back my laughter and say, 'You don't mean Father Barker, do you?' He just laughed and went 'arf, arf' again. I told him that wasn't very nice, but kids are just so funny; how can you not love life."