

Sister Loretta Guenther – St. Joseph Children’s Home – Interviewed Feb. 5, 2009

**“We’re the only consistent thing in their lives.” – Sister Loretta Guenther on the children at St. Joseph Children’s Home**

Not long after Sister Loretta Guenther took her vows to become an Ursuline Sister, she was asked to help out at St. Joseph Children’s Home for a day. From that point on, she was hooked. Sister Loretta often visited the other Sisters at St. Joseph’s and talked about her wish to some day serve there.

While she waited and hoped for the chance, she continued her work as a cook. She made the daily meals at half a dozen schools, including Sacred Heart Academy, St. Peters, and St. Raphaels among others. She later helped in the kitchen at the Ursuline Motherhouse. When asked about her favorite dish to prepare, she quickly answers, with a huge smile on her face and a laugh in her voice, “German potato salad and fried chicken. Everyone loved it!”

Spend five minutes with Sister Loretta and you quickly get drawn into her good mood. “She always has a smile on her face. Sister Loretta is not only always happy but she’s a huge help at St. Joe’s,” said Leann Mays, who also works at the home as the Assistant Director of the Child Development Center. “Sister Loretta works in CDC. It’s more than a daycare. We help develop the child, teach and nurturing the child, everything is learned through play.”

CDC is where Sister Loretta now lives out her mission to teach Christian Living, by sharing her love and time with the children. She rotates among the different age groups relieving workers so they can have lunch or take a break. She keeps a folded scheduled is her pocket, pulling it out to consult where she’s needed throughout each day.

“She does so well with the children in all the classrooms that we want everyone to reap the benefits,” said Mays.

Sister Loretta loves working with all the children, especially the babies. “I call them angel babies, because they’re angels, gifts from God,” she said, a big smile on her face.

She enjoys helping out in the development center but it’s not where she began her work at the orphanage. After years of waiting for the chance, an opportunity for her to serve at the home came in 1974. Encouraged by Sister Annette Rutledge who was at St. Joseph’s for 40 years, Sister Loretta wrote a letter on why she wanted to live out her mission as an Ursuline Sister at St. Joseph Children’s Home.

She was asked to serve as a room mother for a group of young boys. "It wasn't what I'd wanted. I was nervous about taking care of boys, but after just a little time, they were my joy. I'd make sure they got up in the morning and went to bed at night."

Years later she'd serve as a room mother for a group of girls, and would continue to serve where the need was greatest in the home. "I've been a mom to a lot of children."

Sister Loretta has many stories about the children she loves so much. Her heart seems to pour out to each child she's known. One little girl's words seemed to touch her the most as she uses them to explain how so many of the orphans at the home feel.

"Every night when I'd put the girls to bed, this one little girl would ask me if I would be there in the morning when she woke. I'd promise to be there. Then, I got sick and had to go to the hospital in the night. I wasn't there the next two mornings. She was upset when I next saw her and said I lied. I did my best to explain, but these little children have been left and hurt so often in their lives that they're scared it will happen again. We're the only consistent thing in their lives."

Sister Loretta seems to love those whom she's worked with as much as they children. She called Sister Annette her "mentor" and named off several presidents who oversaw the home, telling how each helped make it a better place.

"We've had 6 or 7 presidents since I came on. We've had Sisters come and go, until I'm the only one left. We've had changes in the uniforms the kids wear and the building. I've seen a lot of changes through the years," Sister Loretta said, before pausing and adding another thought, "But you've got to change with the times. That's important to remember. We have grow."

That growth included voting to allow the children to wear jeans and making sure the chapel was kept up and restored as needed. After all the changes she's been through and all time she has spent at St. Joseph's, she said she's never regretted asking to come to the home.

"It's the simplicity, the love that children have that makes them so special," she said, the smile returning to her face, brighter than before. "I do it for God's greater honor and glory. I'm so blessed to be here because I know children are so close to God."