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Thank you, sister

by Kate Childs Graham

Last January, the Vatican launched an investigation of communities of women religious in the United States. From those I've spoken with -- lay folks, women religious, priests and so on -- the reactions are mixed. Some see the investigation as an opportunity to look inward and revamp less-than-just practices that have been structurally ingrained in communities of women religious for hundreds of years. Others see the investigation as an unfair attack on these communities. Still others are worried about the fate of communities of women religious as a result of this non-transparent process.

No matter what side of the fence you are on, there is no doubt that this investigation has significantly raised the profile of women religious in the United States and has given many people a platform to express support and gratitude for these women who have given us so much. Even Congress joined in and passed a resolution (H.Res. 441) honoring women religious in the United States for their "humble service and courageous sacrifice throughout U.S. history.?"

To provide an online platform for people of all stripes to express their support and gratitude for women religious, last month I launched (with a little help from my friends) a letter campaign in support of women religious titled "Thank You, Sister." Hundreds of people have written letters of support and sent them to thankyousister@gmail.com. These letters will be posted at www.thankyousister.com throughout the month of November and sent to Mother Mary Clare Millea, Cardinal Franc Rode, Cardinal Francis George and Pope Benedict XVI as well as leadership teams of communities of women religious in the US.

I invite each of you, no matter your political or theological persuasion, to join me in writing a letter. Below, I offer my letter as but one example:

Women religious have always been a huge part of my life. My first trip as an infant was to witness the final vows of two of my mom's college friends. From that moment on, I

imbibed love from and love for women religious.

While the women religious who have impacted my life are too many to mention by name, I especially hold one sister in my heart as I write this letter. Sr. Sue, a Sister of Providence and one whose final vows I slept through as an infant, passed away last year at the young age of 57. Her death following a short-lived battle with cancer came as a great shock and tragedy to all those whom Sue knew and loved.

Sr. Sue's passion was music. This passion was contagious. I caught it and thousands of other young women whom Sue educated at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College caught it as well.

When Sue taught us a note or led us in song or even did a jazz square, the spirit of providence rang out. It is kind of hard to explain, but every time I hear certain songs -- "Our Lady of Providence," "Balm in Gilead," "Harvest of Justice," "The Long and Winding Road," "Both Sides Now" -- my heart, my soul, my gut fill with this feeling of hope, of peace ? of providence.

Sue had unwavering faith in every student she taught. Even when we let her down (and she'd let us know if we did, as any good teacher would), the love and understanding outweighed any disappointment that may have scratched the surface. She helped us know how to be our best and reminded us of what our best was when we forgot.

Through music, Sue helped me love my faith. She took the *Gather* songbook to the next level, assuring that songs were relevant to the readings and allowing us to experiment with harmonies that continue to buzz in my ears to this day. She helped me pray and find solace through song when tragedy struck my family as a child.

The list of ways that Sr. Sue enhanced my life goes on and on. I hope that Sue had some idea of the impact she had on our lives. I regret that I didn't tell her this often enough when she was alive. But I suppose, as with most things in life, it is better late than never.

Thank you, Sr. Sue. Thank you, Sisters all. Your impact on my life has been immeasurable.

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