

IHM^s IN ACTION



Sister Christine (Christine Marie) Gellings, IHM, is a spiritual director and clinical social worker ministering in the Raleigh, N.C. diocese, where she has lived since 1976.

She has served as a teacher, as vocation director for the IHM Sisters, as the director of a retreat center, as a pastoral associate and as the diocesan coordinator for spiritual development in Raleigh.

"When I first moved to North Carolina, less than one percent of the population was Catholic. A few years later, we rejoiced when that figure doubled to nearly two percent," Sister Chris says.

"After working in Greenville, NC in a parish and with the diocese in Raleigh, NC for several years, I was drawn to a different ministry. People had talked to me for years about their spiritual lives, and the IHM community had educated me in spiritual direction. I saw becoming a spiritual director as a natural movement."

Before long, Sister Chris realized many of her clients wanted to talk to her about the issues and experiences affecting their lives. She enrolled in the social work program at the University of North Carolina to get more training in order to be able to help them sort through those issues and experiences.

She earned her MSW in 1991 and began working as both a spiritual director and as a therapist.

"A week after I graduated, I got calls from spiritual direction clients asking for therapy appointments," recalls Sister Chris. "I work with many people for whom spirituality is very important, including members of the clergy from different faith traditions.

"Therapy is a gentle process of working things through, one step at a time," she continues. "It can't be rushed. The gift and the grace are there for me for long-term work."

Sister Chris sometimes integrates both spiritual direction and therapy.

"If I think it would be helpful, I'll ask my client – whether it's a spiritual direction client or a therapy client – if he or she would mind if I put on my 'other hat,'" she explains. "Usually, people are open to the idea, and we're able to work to unite the psychological and the spiritual aspects of the issues with which we're working.

"Watching people become able to integrate is life-giving," Sister Chris says. "Seeing the liberation that takes place as people become able to sustain their own lives is a miracle of grace."

Although her ministry can be challenging at times, Sister Chris stays grounded through prayer, creative endeavors such as gardening, cooking and making jewelry and having colleagues with whom she can talk honestly.

"Scripture tells us of God's promise to all people, 'You are precious to me. I am with you and I love you,'" says Sister Chris. "That resonates and calls for a response. It's a message that enables me to do what I do."

Sister Chris is one of the 2011 IHM Jubilarians, celebrating 50 years as an IHM Sister.