

## **Sister Josita Schwab Reflects on Challenges of Today and the Role of Prayer**

As we are in the midst of challenges with the COVID19 pandemic, I am reminded of my days at Northridge Apartments. The diocese asked me to live there, in Sioux Falls, as a friend/advocate to the people. We had refugees from many nationalities and also Americans, colored and white. There were frequent differences between them, and the police were there often. One evening when I returned from a meeting, an African lady and her son were out by their car and the back window had several holes in it. She had just called the police, she asked me to be with her when they came. Several families were involved; it was a difficult night. The police found one boy, but decided it could not be proved. They suggested the lady use her insurance company. The next day I was at the office, our manager was there with a couple who were looking for an apartment. Suddenly the front door slammed open and several women came in pursued by an angry man (his stepson was involved in the car window breaking the night before). Someone called the police. The man and a woman got into fist fighting. The manager and I tried to stop the fighting. Four policemen arrived and they separated the people, listened to what had happened and informed the people that if they were called again all would be put in jail. While they escorted the people home, one officer stayed behind to make sure we were all ok. Then he told us that the angry man said that I was responsible for all of the trouble we had. He took out his handcuffs and told me to put my hands behind my back. I was shocked, but I told him I had to keep them in front as I had an artificial shoulder. Then he laughed and said he was only joking. This episode shook me up, but I had some experience of understanding how this must feel with people who are handcuffed, yet not guilty. It encouraged me to continue to stand up help people in troubled situations, especially with people of different nationalities.

**The most important thing I did was to pray a lot, before a situation explodes, if possible. I learned to keep in prayer those I knew, those who had more problems than others. It helped to take the fear out of helping others.**

My opinion: The COVID19 and racism are not new. They have appeared in a different form from other challenges I have been through in my life. I believe it is harder because so many are dying, peoples' loved ones, and often after such a short illness.

In my past experience, sometimes I could help them, sometimes all I could do was to be with them in their pain. If I knew they believed in God, I prayed with them. If God was not a part of their life we would focus on the person's life, the good they did in their lifetime. If there was not a death but another difficult time in their life, we would concentrate on what was going on and how to deal with it. **Prayer was always there if it fit.**

I was brand new when I started working at Brady Memorial, in Mitchell. In May the following year Mitchell had tornados touch down and do damage for two weeks. We were never hit, so, were surprised one evening to be pounded with big hail stones, breaking windows, followed by two tornados that collided above us. The electricity was out (most of our residents were in bed). Sister William said, "Up front with the people." We stumbled around in the dark. The residents rooms had small night lights that came on from a generator. The sky lights were blown away, rain was pouring in. Staff got push brooms and swept it out the door. The National Guard men came; they had helped with the tornados for two weeks. They called the hardware

store owner to bring a bucket full of flashlights. Now we could see. One of the men on the roof fell through the opening. We hollered for help to rescue him. The men on the roof were covering the holes with plastic, getting soaking wet. I was in food service and we had gas stoves that were not damaged, so I made huge kettles of coffee for the wet men. An amusing thing happened when our 102-year-old resident said that since we had waked him up, I should bring him toast and coffee. I gave him bread and coffee. The mopping up seemed endless, glass everywhere. We comforted our waked up residents, but, thank you, God, no one was hurt. None of the sisters or staff got sleep that night. All of this time, over and over in my mind, I knew when the storm was the strongest that I could die. Inside I was scared, but outside I needed to be there for the residents, who were also frightened. It was a night to remember and be grateful. As daylight came, we could see all business places around us were destroyed, some farms also. I have never taken storms lightly; I saw what they could do. **My security was the internal prayers as I was asking god to protect us. God did that very well.**