

Born to teach

Sister Veronica Grover reflects on years of service at St. Luke and beyond

By Carolyn Steeves
The Mint Hill Times

Sister Veronica Grover would describe herself as an educator. “I love, love teaching and I still do,” Sister Grover said. “When I get up and teach a class here, I still enjoy it immensely. Basically all of my work is teaching...but it’s not all classroom teaching.”

Sister Grover has been a sister in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus for more than 60 years. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus is an international community of 400 sisters.

She was drawn to the Society while attending high school in west Philadelphia. West Catholic High School was host to seven different religious communities, so it was easy to see the differences in the communities.

“I was very attracted to the spirit of the Holy Child sisters, which was a spirit of caring and being attentive to their students in a human way, not just an academic way, but in a very human way and that attracted me,” Sister Grover said.

She was also fascinated by the history of the community and the story of its founder, Cornelia Connelly. The Society is celebrating Connelly’s 200th birthday this year with celebrations around the world.

“Wherever we are, we give priority to the work for justice and peace and the work for the needy, whatever the greatest need is in the area we are in,” Sister Grover said. “Obviously, no one can meet all the needs, but we try to meet the needs.”

Sister Grover’s ministries have taken her to Africa, South America, the Dominican Republic, Harlem, and in 1982, to Charlotte.

She was invited by a member of the clergy who wanted her to teach Catholic Social Training to the Catholics in the area.

“Because the Catholics were a minority here, they hadn’t had all the opportunities for education that we might have had, say, in Philadelphia,” Sister Grover explained. “That’s why I came down here.”



Sister Grover has been at St. Luke since its inception in 1987. PHOTO BY CAROLYN STEEVES

In 1987, Father Joseph Mulligan founded St. Luke’s and asked Sister Grover to come and work with the education and training. “I’ve been here ever since, so I’ve become kind of a landmark in the parish,” she said.

At that time they were meeting in a storefront in Mint Hill Festival. It took nearly seven years to raise the funds for their current building.

“I’ve been here from the beginning and I’ve seen the parish grow,” Sister Grover said. “I saw it start from basically nothing and grow into this big parish of almost 1,600 families...that’s been a very wonderful thing to see and be part of.”

Sister Grover’s work is primarily in training lay ministers at St. Luke’s. Lay ministers serve and volunteer in many ways, but are not ordained. The laity can perform many services for the church, they cannot, however, lead mass.

“My job is to empower (the laity) to do the work that would be done by sisters if there were a lot of sisters here, or the clergy, but the laity have the right to participate in the ministry in the church, too,” Sister Grover said. “Many of them just need to be helped along to do that and that’s my job.”

“Actually, when I first came here I was responsible for a number of things and now almost all of them are under the leadership of the laity and that’s a fact I’m very proud of,” she added.

Lay people at St. Luke’s lead almost all of the outreach and assistance programs. The laity and parishioners of St. Luke’s perpetually amaze Sister Grover.

“I have never been in a community where the people have been as concerned for those in need as they are here,” she said. “And yet these are not wealthy people, these are hard-working middle class people...I’ve always seen some of that, but I’ve never seen it to the extent that I’ve seen it here. These people are remarkable for that.”

Sister Grover thinks their spirit of community is due, in part, to the intimacy of the church’s first location—the storefront in the Mint Hill Festival shopping center.

After 22 years, Sister Grover is still delighted to come to St. Luke’s every day.

“I just love the place. I love the spirit of it, I love the people and I love the way we do the liturgy. I get up in the morning and I’m happy to be here, I really love this parish.”