

# THE Long Haul

“As each one has received a gift,  
use it to serve one another as good  
stewards of God’s varied grace.”

1 PETER 4:10 (NABRE)



Music Appreciation class.

**SR. MARY GOVERT'S TENURE AT USF RANKS #1 ON THE CURRENT EMPLOYEES' LIST AFTER SPENDING 45 YEARS WITH THE UNIVERSITY. SHE KEEPS MOVING AHEAD, ROLLING WITH THE INEVITABLE CHANGES AND DEMONSTRATING THE IMPORTANCE OF FRANCISCAN VALUES.**

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Sr. Mary Govert (BA '62) understands the need for ongoing change and growth at the University of Saint Francis. After all, she has spent 45 years working for USF (or Saint Francis College, in the earlier days), with transformation swirling around her.

Change can be challenging and not universally applauded.

"When they first mentioned football, I said, 'Over my dead body,'" Sr. Mary said, then smiled. "But now I see how football has really contributed to life on the weekends, and to enrollment. The whole growth of athletics has contributed in a positive way to the university."

The growth of athletics ranks as one of many significant changes during Sr. Mary's time as a student, teacher, mission effectiveness officer, registrar and now in a part-time role as a data entry specialist. When she arrived in Fort Wayne as a freshman in 1957—out of Bishop Noll High School in Hammond, Indiana—she entered an all-female college. Saint Francis had a small enrollment, with about 50 students living on campus.

The instructors were primarily priests or sisters, and the students followed a strict dress code and curfew.

"Our social life depended on Tri-State and Indiana Tech, which were all male at that time," Sr. Mary said of her undergraduate years. "We were always looking for dances and social events and we would invite the guys from there. Some very good marriages came out of those times."

Sr. Mary started her entry into the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration in 1959 and finished her degree in English at Saint Francis in 1962. She became a licensed biology teacher and taught at Fort Wayne's Bishop Luers High School, Mishawaka's Marian High School and a school of nursing in Memphis, Tenn. "I saw the outside of Graceland, but I wouldn't pay to go in," Sr. Mary said with a chuckle. She came back to teach philosophy and theology at Saint Francis for 18 years prior to many years as the registrar.

"The students have become more serious, in a sense, over the years," she said. "They're more job oriented. I believe a much more liberal arts background would serve them better overall. They see these commercials saying you don't have to take all 'that stuff.' I would tell students, 'I teach you *the stuff* that's going to be important for your whole life.'"

Sr. Mary said she appreciates USF's recent reemphasis on its Catholic identity, originally established when the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration founded the college in 1890.

"When I was a student and first teaching here, our Catholic identity wasn't additionally stressed because everybody here was a Catholic and identified as Catholic," she said. "It's good that we are focusing on what that means now. And it's good to hear students talking about Franciscan values and how important they are."

Sr. Mary came from a family of seven children, with four of them earning degrees from Saint Francis College. Another sister earned a degree from the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Ill. "She always said, 'I have a St. Francis sweatshirt, too,'" Sr. Mary said. Their father worked 40 years for DuPont and their mother was a stay-at-home mom.

Sr. Mary now ranks as the current employee with the most years of service to USF. Some of her former students, such as Dr. Amy Obringer, are professors now. She believes USF has done a good job of becoming recognized as part of the Fort Wayne landscape.

"Early on, even as we went coed, we were still known as the women's college on the west side of town that people didn't consider unless they were Catholic," she said. "We are viewed very differently now, in terms of education, health sciences, business and art. Most of our major programs have become an integral part of the fabric of the city."

At the heart of USF, then and now, is the Franciscan spirit.

"We're doing a better job now of being explicit about it," she said. "There's a gentleness—politeness might be a better word—that people contrast with larger colleges where it can feel cold. I think the smallness of this place contributes to that gentility or collegiality you feel here."

Sr. Mary has no plans for full retirement and continues to play the organ and piano and participate in the Cathedral Choir.

"I like music. I loved to play tennis and volleyball when I had a body that could do that," she said. "I will stay here and work for as long as I'm able to contribute. At my age, that might not be too much longer."