

Sister Diane Therese Pinchot, OSU, MFA, '68

teacher, artist, blessing to all

Sr. Diane Therese Pinchot has long used her art to raise awareness of social justice issues and the Ursuline belief in anti-violence. As a teacher, she imparts those values to her students along with a love of the arts.

Since 2004, her art has provided another venue for her to help women who have struggled first-hand with some of those same issues. While teaching ceramics to women at the Community Women's shelter on Payne Avenue in Cleveland, Sr. Diane Therese met two Sisters of Saint Joseph, Sister Felicia Petruziello and Sister Carrie Vail, the founding ladies of the Women's Outreach Center.

"They encouraged me to join them at the Outreach Center. At first glance I thought I might be asked to clean toilets," she said. "But they wanted me to teach ceramics."

The Outreach Center, founded by the women religious of Cleveland, is designed to support women who have experienced homelessness and who are in transition. The mission is to accompany and empower them as they strive to attain self-sufficiency and to begin to reach their potential.

Sr. Diane Therese teaches a Japanese art form known as raku, which is meant to turn life struggles into a piece of quiet beauty.

"Raku is about determination, faith and endurance, overcoming your difficulties and facing your demons. Many of these women have survived many hardships," she said.

The women quickly came to love making the ceramic pieces, finding in the work a voice and a means to express themselves. In November, they worked together on what Sr. Diane Therese called the "Blessing Project." First, they created ceramic tiles, then they inscribed their blessings on the tiles and fit them together.

"Whenever I walk in and ask them how they are, they say, 'We're blessed.'" Sr. Diane Therese said. "It never ceases to amaze me that every time I go there, I get more from them than I could ever give."



For the past three years, she has also helped organize a field trip for the women at the Center to come to Ursuline, where they can fire some of the art they made.

According to Sr. Diane Therese, a raku firing is a community building experience. "The word 'raku' (a Japanese process) means pleasant, harmonious, joyous and that's what the day certainly is."

By bringing the women to the campus, students began to get to know them and form relationships, and some begin volunteering at the Center.

"We are really pulling people together for the common good. We're really breaking down barriers," Sr. Diane Therese said.

