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### Judith Koepl : Alma Mater Award

St. Norbert College

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# 2020 Alma Mater Award

## Judith Koepl '63

“Judy loves the Lord and lives His word each day in all of her actions.”

One of Judy Koepl’s nominators had that to say about her dear friend, and one need only look at Judy’s lifetime of service to see the truth in it.

Her care and compassion have been extended to others at nearly every stage of their lives. Judy’s first work after leaving St Norbert as one of its first resident woman graduates was with an adoption agency, helping to find supportive homes for children. Next, staying home to raise three children of her own, she became an original member of the Theology for Mothers group, meeting regularly to talk with other young women about Christ’s presence in family life.

Judy was hired as liturgy coordinator for St. Paul’s University Catholic Center in Madison, Wis., where she was a pioneer of women’s leadership in the church. Her work there also included an emphasis on diversity and inclusion, a cause she has championed throughout her career and into her “retirement,” where she interacted with the multicultural club at the local high school to look at racial issues and find common ground.

Seniors have also benefited from Judy’s selfless and untiring service. On staff with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Judy developed and coordinated the Driver Escort Program, which inspired older persons to serve as volunteer drivers in rural areas for health care appointments and Meals on Wheels.

Perhaps most indicative of Judy’s compassionate heart is her vocation to those who are grieving. When she was 27, Judy’s parents died within five days of each other. The experience of working through her own grief put Judy on a path to help others in similar situations. She earned a master’s degree in geriatric social work, and was hired by HospiceCare to develop and direct the first hospice bereavement program for both family members and medical staff. In 1991 she opened The Center For Life & Loss Integration, a grief counseling center at the Norbertines’ San Damiano residence on the shores of Lake Monona, Wis. Her practice continued for 27 years before she retired in 2018.

Perhaps her most memorable experience was being called to New York after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, providing bereavement support to victim’s families and first responders as a Red Cross

disaster mental health worker. She also was a bereavement consultant to funeral homes throughout south central Wisconsin, developing an aftercare program for grief support, and she served as a crisis intervention counselor for traumatic deaths in the Madison community.

In recent years, Judy has brought her St. Norbert values to Cedar Community, the West Bend, Wis., retirement center where she lives. There she has helped to establish a memorial garden and created a support group to help seniors talk about their grief.

From helping young children find love and security to helping the elderly find peace and comfort after the loss of a loved one, Judy has tirelessly served across all generations and across her entire community. Quiet, loving and determined, as one nominator described her, Judy Koepl has built an inspiring legacy that makes her a fitting recipient of the Alma Mater Award.

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