

THE CULTURE

How We Lived | One Good Turn

A man took a room in a religious Sisters' community. What happened next is a modern miracle.



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Kent Millard (front left), at his 80th birthday with Precious Blood sisters and United Seminary staff. At his left is Sister Joyce Lehman, past president of Precious Blood and a United trustee.

When Kent Millard became interim president of United Theological Seminary in 2016, he phoned the seminary's neighbors, the Sisters of the Precious Blood, a Roman Catholic community of consecrated women. He had a question: Could he stay with them?

Millard was commuting to Dayton, Ohio, from his home two hours away, and because he anticipated a short interim period – six months, tops – he was looking for an inexpensive, temporary place to stay a few nights a week.

The sisters said yes, and that's how, as Millard puts it, "I started staying with 45 of my favorite sisters one or two nights a week."

He eventually moved to his own home in Dayton once he became president but stayed in touch with his new convent friends. In January 2020, he brought a group of about 20 international students to enjoy a dinner in the convent's beautiful dining room.

At a neighboring table Millard spotted Sister Deb, whom he knew was undergoing cancer treatment. He stopped and asked how she was feeling. She told him she felt awful and that the prognosis was not good. When he asked if they could pray for her, she said yes.

Millard and the students gathered around Sister Deb and laid their hands on her or lifted their hands toward her. In different languages, they began to pray for her healing. When other sisters in the dining room saw what Millard and the students were doing, they formed a second circle and started singing.

"It was a holy moment," Millard recalled. "They were singing, we were praying, and Deb was crying." When they brought the prayer to a close, Millard told Sister Deb that he'd continue praying for her. That was the last time he saw her before COVID shut the convent to visitors.

Several months later, with the convent still closed, Millard called to check on Sister Deb. The receptionist said, "Oh, haven't you heard?" "Heard what?" Millard said.

"Well, she's cancer free," the receptionist responded. "The doctors don't know how because she was seriously ill."

In the spring of 2022, when the convent finally reopened to visitors, Millard was invited back for lunch, where he saw Sister Deb for the first time since their encounter in the dining room two years earlier.

"I said, 'Hi Sister, how are you?' And she just hugged me and said, 'You know, that prayer made all the difference in the world.'"