

San Antonio Beacon of Peace Sister Martha Ann Kirk

1986 FST graduate's teaching rooted in nature, prayer, the arts and social justice

In 1974, Sister Martha Ann Kirk found herself sitting on a hill in Assisi, Italy. A Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word, she was backpacking through Europe and contemplating her next move. A doctorate was in the future of the University of the Incarnate Word professor, but with her work long merging elements of art, drama, dance and history with theology and social justice, she was torn between areas of study.

Surrounded by Assisi's natural beauty, rich art and the gentle spirit of St. Francis, she realized she didn't have to choose. Kirk went onto the Franciscan School of Theology, melding her passions in art and theology, and building upon the strains of Franciscan spirituality that were so important to her teaching.

Her first book "Dancing with Creation" was written as part of her doctorate studies at FST and explores the animated Franciscan traditions of using dance, drama, music and art to spread the gospel — a tradition Kirk continues to this day from a nuclear test site in Nevada to the U.S.-Mexico border.

"So, so much of what I do is grounded in what I experienced and learned at FST," Kirk said in a recent interview. "I have learned much about compassion, creativity and peacebuilding from the Franciscans. These have unfolded in my life as a professor ... and as a Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word."

A professor of religion and social justice at UIW in San Antonio, she has traversed the globe building bridges between people of different faiths, telling stories of women's resilience and unity, sharing in prayer through dance and drama, standing in solidarity with nature and speaking out against the inhumane treatment of immigrants. She's spent years on the road in Iraq, Turkey, Palestine and beyond studying pockets of tolerance and visiting schools combating poverty and radicalization. Along her journey, she's written about her experiences and the stories of those she's met in "[Iraqi Women of Three Generations: Challenges, Education, and Hopes for Peace](#)" and "[Growing Seeds of Peace](#)." Her book "[Women of Bible Lands: A Pilgrimage to Compassion and Wisdom](#)," serves as an inspirational, interfaith guidebook of Middle East sites associated with women and examines the scarcity of women's writings within the bible.

For her dedication to international peacemaking, Kirk has received both the Texas Pax Christi and San Antonio Peace Laureate awards and was profiled in the PBS series Women War and Peace.

Kirk, a familiar figure in the San Antonio community, and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word gather with locals and their beloved pets each year for a blessing of the animals amidst the historic, lush nature preserve at the entrance of their Headwaters Sanctuary. For Kirk, her Franciscan spirituality isn't simply limited to a once a year prayer, it is a deep, lifelong relationship with god through nature.

Kirk is a beacon of peace sharing the deep wisdom of Franciscan faith and spirituality with the world. A zealous advocate, educator and peacemaker, she is modest about her work and concedes that "Franciscans are bashful." But, she added, "We need to tell stories of the good they do loudly and clearly!"