Jim McLean: Hello, I'm Jim McLean. I'm a member of the Kansas Oral History Project board and a mostly retired reporter for Kansas newspapers and public radio stations. We're here at the Kansas Statehouse. Today is August 26, 2026, and we're here to interview Sister Therese Bangert, a longtime lobbyist for social justice causes. Sister Therese is a member of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. She's been a mainstay here at the Statehouse for nearly forty years, advocating for policies to improve the lives of Kansas children, immigrants, and families in need of assistance, just to name a few.

This interview is part of the Kansas Oral History Project's series recognizing notable Kansans. The Oral History Project is a nonprofit corporation that collects and preserves oral histories of Kansans. The project is supported by donations from generous individuals and occasional grants. As always, our videographer today is Dave Heinemann, former Kansas state legislator, and our producer is Susie Murphy. Sister Therese, welcome and thanks for agreeing to do this.

Sister Therese Bangert: Well, thank you for giving me this opportunity.

JM: I've been looking forward to this for a while. I always like to start with a person's origin story. You grew up in Nebraska in a large family.

STB: Yes.

JM: Just talk about that a bit, your upbringing.

STB: I was raised on a farm, and I need to say, yes, I am from a large family. I am the third of twelve, and I tell people I'm an overly responsible, bossy oldest, even though I'm no. three. The kind of unique thing for me was that both my mother and my dad graduated from Creighton University, my dad in accounting, my mother in journalism. People would say she never used her degree because she got married and had the twelve of us, but I cannot tell you how much I think that impacted my life and our lives, that whole emphasis on education, the emphasis on the wider world. My mother just had one sister who was nine years older than her, and my dad was an only child. So, the 12 of us came along. I say that your siblings are the best gift your parents give you. They are a great joy to me.

JM: And mostly sisters, right?

STB: There are eight girls and four boys. Our youngest brother died in November of ['24] from cancer, but the rest of us are all hale and hearty.

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JM: I took it from the material that you sent us to prepare for this interview, you just alluded to it, that your upbringing had a lot to do with your chosen direction in life, your journalist mother in particular. You had that spark in your life. I assume partially because of your upbringing for these social justice issues and maybe to be an advocate, which is what you ended up doing.

STB: I think no one was more surprised than me that I ended up in the Capitol, being here because I hadn't ever thought of that. When I entered the Sisters, we were nurses or teachers. I taught for ten years, and I loved teaching. I loved the kids. So, I never left that because I didn't like it. I always felt called. I felt called, and that's how I got to St. Vincent Home in Topeka. That's part of how I got there.

JM: When did you feel called? When did that happen in your life?

STB: I was not somebody that aspired to be a sister. In the last semester of my senior year in high school, the priest said, "I'm talking to all the seniors. Have you considered a vocation?" I said, "Well, maybe, but not now. I'm going to go to college." But that got stronger for me, and it's like God is God. If God calls, I'll answer. But I was not hep on being a sister. I was not really delighted to leave home because in those days, you were never going to come back. I had a four-year-old sister and a two-year-old brother. That killed me to leave them and the rest of my siblings, but I've been very graced with a lot of peace in my calling, and I'm grateful.

JM: So, your first stop after joining the Sisters of Charity was where?

STB: Leavenworth. We had two years of formation before we took the first vows—poverty, chastity, obedience. Then I had a year of college. After that year of college, I went to Los Angeles and had fifty students in my first-grade classroom in Los Angeles, California.

JM: I'm not at all an expert on the Catholic Church and so forth, but as I understand it, the different orders have different priorities and different callings?

STB: That's right. We call them charisms. The charism of Mother Xavier Ross who is our foundress goes back to St. Vincent. St. Vincent and Louise de Marillac lived in France during the time of the Revolution and terrible poverty. Vincent said, "We see Christ in the face of the poor." His emphasis was to see Christ in the face of the poor and to care for them.

JM: Then you arrived here in Topeka at St. Vincent's which had been an orphanage but had transitioned to be a place where kids were in transition from foster care families, that kind of thing. They were in care there for different periods of time, right?

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STB: Right, the children before, a lot of them had gotten to be eighteen there, but our goal always was to have their trauma reduced enough for them to be able to navigate in the world outside of institutions. That was a high ideal. Our children had a lot of trauma.

JM: And the St. Vincent was attached to the Sisters of Charities, correct?

STB: It was attached to the archdiocese.

JM: What did you do there? How long were you there?

STB: The first three years, I taught. My first year, my student was eight years old. He had been kicked out of kindergarten three times, and he could not write 'me', had had terrible trauma from his home. He just was a wild man. He learned to read, but he was my first student. I would have one student at a time.

Another student who, every year at his birthday, he would get so angry, and he thought that his mother when he was born left him in a trash can, and the cats were licking on him. I mean, when you find out these things, what these children carry, it's no wonder they have [behavior issues].

I never will forget my first, what we called "intake session," where we would talk about a child and see if we thought that we could serve them at St. Vincent's. This child who was eleven years old had been prostituted by her dad. It introduced me to a whole world that I was totally unfamiliar with.

JM: A farm girl from Nebraska sees the big, wide world.

STB: That's right. I'm not saying Nebraska is perfect or our community was perfect, but this was very different. This was very different. So, these children taught me a lot. And in that time, we were connected with the Menninger Clinic which was a great help in helping me learn how to—

JM: Best help these kids.

STB: How to best help. Exactly.

JM: So, you were there for how long?

STB: I was there nine years.

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JM: You started your lobbying career—I loved the way you put it—you're a low-paid lobbyist. You started your lobbying career in 1987. I'm just so curious about how that came about.

STB: At some point in my life because after I left St. Vincent's, I asked if I could volunteer two days a week down at Let's Help. I thought that Marge Roberts of Let's Help in Topeka—

JM: Let's Help was a multidenominational food pantry, that kind of thing, here in Topeka.

STB: And lunch, yes, all kinds of services. I thought Marge Roberts was the Mother Theresa of Topeka. I wanted to learn from her. So, Paul Johnson had an office there, and he asked me at some point to come up here [to the Capitol] and give testimony. I was at that time going to Topeka State Hospital. On Sundays, I went out to the [State] Reception and Diagnostic Center and prayed with the prisoners [as the Catholic chaplain]. I went to Topeka State Hospital, like twenty or twenty-five hours a week. "I can only deal with so many institutions."

But then I asked my superior if I could come up here two days a week instead of going to Let's Help and just learn the process.

JM: By "here" you mean the Statehouse?

STB: The Statehouse.

JM: We'll talk about Paul Johnson again because he's another person I think in your orbit who was in that same group of lobbyists—he lobbied for the environment and agricultural issues and stewardship and those kinds of things. He was the one who first got you into this?

STB: That was the first kind of nudge of the Spirit to come. Then Mike Hayden had come into office. I've grown to respect him a lot, I need to say. But he'd come into office kind of on this slide that said, "If we get the death penalty back, Kansas will just be wonderful."

JM: Governor Hayden, that was one of his main campaign planks was a restoration of the death penalty because famously Governor Carlin when campaigning had promised to sign the bill. He wasn't for it, but he would sign the bill, and then once he became governor, he recanted. He just couldn't do it.

STB: He couldn't do it.

JM: So, Hayden campaigned, "We're going to restore the death penalty."

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STB: And that to me seemed so false. I knew that there were hard times on the farms. There were older people losing their care because of cuts to Medicaid. I knew there were a lot of other issues that were much more important than that. It just didn't have integrity to me. So, I thought, "Well, I've walked with a lot of prisoners. I'll be a part of this." Bill Lucero.

JM: Bill Lucero, of course.

STB: The first job he gave me was to go to the forty senators and ask them where they are on the death penalty.

JM: He led a coalition against the death penalty. Bill Lucero, he has a very interesting story as to how he came by that position.

STB: That's right. His father was murdered.

JM: He came away from that tragedy completely against the death penalty.

STB: That's right.

JM: So, that was your initial cause, campaigning against the effort to restore the death penalty.

STB: Having conversations with people to say, "Why are you for this? Why are we doing it?" I had a young man named Michael Wolff who showed me how to get to the offices in the Capitol. I had no idea how to do that at the time. The two of us were a team. Of course, Bill Lucero was around at times.

JM: So, you were officially then a lobbyist for the Sisters of Charity while you were doing this?

STB: No, I was a lobbyist for the Kansas Coalition against the Death Penalty.

JM: Did you ever become a lobbyist for the Sisters?

STB: I did. I had a period of time where I was a lobbyist for the Kansas Catholic Conference. Then that changed at some point. Then I put on the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth badge.

JM: So, the death penalty was a big motivation for you to jump into the policy debate.

STB: Exactly. Then I learned all kinds of other things.

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JM: Of course.

STB: But the thing that happened is that the first year that I lobbied, six senators changed their vote. We did not get the death penalty in 1987.

JM: I remember that.

STB: I cannot tell you how horrified I was when the next session started, and they had a death penalty bill. I thought, "This comes back? We didn't get rid of it?" I was learning the process, but that still shocked me, yes.

JM: What was your message to lawmakers in those days, urging them to vote against it?

STB: I do better to listen to them, to listen to what their reasons are.

JM: And what were their reasons?

STB: The first legislator that I talked to, and I think his office was right down below here. "We just have some animals up there, and we need to get rid of them." I thought, "Is that what I'm going to hear forty times?" It's not what I heard forty times.

JM: You heard more nuanced reasons.

STB: Yes. People could talk about the cost, which is a real reason not to have the death penalty, but they just had some issues with taking people's lives.

JM: I think I know this as a fact, but I'm sure you do. We did restore the death penalty.

STB: Yes, we did.

JM: But has anybody been executed since then?

STB: No one's been executed. We restored it in 1994. I think the first trial, which I went to was in 1996, the first person who [was given] a sentence of death.

JM: What were the other issues when you really got into this lobbying gig that you started advocating about?

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STB: Really the next big one was the earned income tax credit [(EITC)]. I worked with a really good team from United Community Services, Carol Smith. She got Governor Graves to put it in his State of the State that we should have a tax cut, but we also should have the earned income tax credit refundable in that tax cut.

JM: Let's pause a minute to explain that because famously, the person who advocated the EITC at the federal level was Richard Nixon years and years ago. So this is a debate in Kansas. The earned income tax credit, there's a threshold at which if you're below a certain income threshold, you not only don't pay taxes, but you get the taxes you've contributed on your paycheck back. That's the refundable aspect of it.

STB: Yes.

JM: So, Governor Graves in a State of the State said we should do this.

STB: Yes, and the amount you get back depends on how much your income is, and I think it tops out at—I don't know—$55,000 or so, and how many children you have, but it tops out at three children. So, I always say it's like Christmas time at tax time for low-income families because they use that very well in my experience.

JM: What happened in that debate? I don't recall specifically.

STB: I remember because the House didn't have it in, and the Senate, maybe I don't remember that correctly, but it was up to the Senate to get it to stay in the bill. And I was always peppering about whether or not—

JM: So, there was a bigger tax bill, the tax cut bill? There was a component to that?

STB: There was a whole tax cut bill.

JM: Any time we need a detail checked, we can check with our videographer, Dave Heinemann. He remembers everything.

[laughing]

STB: It was part of the tax cut bill. When they finally got to the end, it was like are we—because some people were strongly not wanting that in.

JM: Why? Because they thought it cost too much?

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STB: They thought it cost too much, yes, but other things were in there. This was the piece for people who were working. It's only on earned income. It's not on Social Security. It's not on Disability. It's not on anything else. It's just earned income. People who were working to have somewhat of a break is what I called it, and especially those with children. Senator Sherman Jones—

JM: I remember Sherman from Wyandotte County, a former major league baseball player if I remember.

STB: That's right, a favorite of mine. "Don't worry, Sister, it's going to be in there." That had the support of the governor, which was really important.

JM: So, it survived.

STB: It survived. It's something that I've followed over the years. They wanted to get rid [of the refundable portion] through the years. I would also say the other thing is, it's increased from the 10 percent it was in its original bill in 1998, if I have that date right. It's no longer 10 percent. I think right now it's at 15 percent. But when the Republicans wanted a few Democratic votes for something, if I might say so, on a tax bill, then they would say, "If we raise the earned income tax credit 2 percent," would you give us—

JM: The carrot and stick approach to getting the votes you need to get something passed.

STB: That's how this process works.

JM: You learned that.

STB: I learned that. Marvin Barkis said in one of my first years here, "People don't realize how hard it is to get sixty-three people to agree on something."

JM: Former speaker, Marvin Barkis from Louisburg, now the late Marvin Barkis, not too long ago.

STB: Right.

JM: As I recall when I got to the Statehouse, it was a very robust group of what I would call "social justice lobbyists." Melissa Ness with Kansas Children's Services, Paul Johnson, you mentioned him before. There were several people, and it was a group that really did I think have

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an impact. They were listened to in those days. Can you recall some other names from people who you worked with? Paul Johnson, clearly, I think we mentioned him several times.

STB: Right. By the time we got to the early two thousands and the immigration stuff was—

JM: We can talk about that.

STB: Was going forward, that was the business coalition that we worked with. I'd say they could get in the back doors. But those of us that were concerned about the restrictive laws that Kris Kobach was putting forth, we could do the testimonies, but the business coalition would have the power behind the doors and the power behind the committee chairs.

JM: And could make an economic case for why we needed it. I can't place this on a timeline, but I remember one year covering a fairly contentious debate. There was a problem with automobile accidents and people not having insurance. There was a proposal that people ought to be able to get, even if they were not here legally, get driver's licenses so they could get insurance. I remember that sparked a big debate.

STB: Yes. The driver's licenses for immigrants, that there would be some way that we could have them drive legally and the in-state tuition. That was in the days that Melinda Lewis who was from El Centro in Kansas City. I always called her the "Queen of In-state." It wouldn't have happened without her. She got the young people here to talk to the legislators. And when the legislators talked to those young people who wanted to go to [college or trade] school but didn't have the right papers, that's when in-state came through. At one point she said, "We can either get in-state or the driver's license, but we're not going to get both." This is the political stuff, and I think we have a better chance of getting in-state. So, that happened in 2004. Really it was a miracle then because 9/11 turned people sour.

JM: It made a difference in how people thought—

STB: On immigrants. Those weren't immigrants. They were people who were here legally, I think.

JM: Those issues were a precursor to the big round of contentious issues regarding immigration with again then Secretary of State Kris Kobach, now Attorney General Kris Kobach, certainly President Trump in both of his two terms. The issues of immigration heated up substantially.

STB: That's right.

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JM: So, most recently, I think just last year, they wanted to pass a resolution here in the Statehouse that endorsing essentially President Trump's deportation policies, right?

STB: Yes.

JM: As I recall, you were the only person to testify against it in the House Committee.

STB: I was the only person that testified against it in person, yes.

JM: In person.

STB: I got a lot of questions.

JM: Did you?

STB: From the Democrats, yes.

JM: Like what? What questions?

STB: What does Pope Francis say about it? What do you say about the immigrants that are committing crimes? Why don't they do it legally? One of the legislators said that she doesn't have any trouble getting people to be legal to work in her business. My comment to her was real spontaneous. "You must have a good lawyer" because I hear how people—there's no path for them.

JM: And then the Senate Committee they didn't let you testify at all.

STB: No. They put out the announcement that that bill was going to be heard, but they did not have it out within twenty-four hours. If somebody hadn't told me that they saw it like at 10:00 at night that the bill was going to be heard, I wouldn't have known. It wasn't time for us to get advocates together. I just asked at the end of the [proponent] testimony of Mr. Kobach, AG Kobach, if I could speak because I've watched Chairpersons say before they close the hearing. "Does anybody else want to say anything?"

JM: How was Kobach involved? It was a legislative hearing, wasn't it?

STB: He talked on and on about this bill. He was there.

JM: He was testifying in favor of the bill.

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STB: It was his bill.

JM: And they said no?

STB: They said, "No, I'm sorry. You can't." Senator Thompson told me, "I'm sorry. You can't." I said, "Oh, I thought that I could." Then Marci Francisco I might say and Faust Godeau…

JM: Marti Francisco from Lawrence.

STB: … Senator Faust Goudeau said, "Why don't you let her testify?" Marci came up with, "Will you still take written testimony from her?" He said, "Yes, if it's in by Tuesday at noon" because it was Dr. King's Holiday. So, that was how that whole thing blew up.

It was a lesson to me because I couldn't quickly say, "Why didn't Thompson let me talk?"

JM: Senator Mike Thompson from Kansas City.

STB: But when you looked at it, the message that I wanted to share had a much broader coverage after that incident.

JM: Sure it did.

STB: If he would have let me mumble through a few words that I scratched down—

JM: You scribbled down.

STB: Yes.

JM: You became a cause *célèbre* then.

STB: It went far and wide, internationally.

JM: The diminutive Sister Therese Bangert was shut down by the mean old legislature. They wouldn't let you talk.

STB: I like the word "Sister." I'm not that fond of the word "nun," but I got why people used it. A nun wasn't able to talk. So, the immigration stuff has been close to my heart. I watch the suffering. I watch the angst of the children.

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JM: You're patting your microphone there.

STB: Oh, sorry.

JM: That's okay.

STB: I watch the angst of the children who wonder if their parents are going to be there when they get home.

JM: I remember doing a podcast on the future of rural Kansans, and I spent a lot of time in Dodge City. While I was there, I interviewed Ernestor De La Rosa.

STB: Oh, sure.

JM: Who is again one of the Dreamers. In other words, he was brought to this country at a very young age and has always lived here. He was like the assistant to the city manager in Dodge City at the time. He's now I think in Topeka. I heard his story. Every now and then, you go along for a while and everything seems fine, and then the issue rises, and again you feel very much insecure about [whether] you are going to be able to stay in this country. It was very compelling listening to his story.

STB: His story is multiplied thousands, hundreds of thousands of times all over this nation.

JM: Again, in the course of the podcast, I learned from a social demographer at K-State that there were very few places in this state, rural places, that are growing from a population standpoint. The only places that are—Liberal, Garden City, Dodge City—that corner of the state because of the meat-packing industry and the dairies and so forth because of the immigrant labor that's necessary. Every place else is still shrinking.

STB: And they've coalesced to build community together in so many of those places.

JM: Yes.

STB: Garden [City], I know a couple of the Sisters there. They're part of it, but they've made community together. That's why when I was working with the business coalition at one point, I said, "I need to be sure that you understand that my voice is not just for workers. My voice is for these families, for the communities that they're part of. I'm not just advocating for workers.

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Because we want the work of their hands, we don't necessarily want their humanity sometimes." That bothers me.

JM: As a lobbyist for these various causes, you were up against forces that have a lot more resources many times to get what they wanted—a lot more money. They could provide campaign donations to legislators, which is a way, of course, of influencing them and take them out to dinner, that kind of thing. But that's not the way you approach the job.

STB: No. I can't as a 501(c)3, Sister of Charity of Leavenworth.

JM: You can just listen and talk, right?

STB: I can listen and talk and respect them, care about them, pray for them, and give my view when appropriate. But, no, I don't have that kind of—it bothers me that the money has so much power in the process because it really colors the process in a way that damages it.

JM: Perhaps more so today than when you first started.

STB: No doubt.

JM: So, you're outgunned, so to speak, from a resource standpoint, I was intrigued by something you had in the materials you submitted that when you would talk amongst the people in your coalition, when you were trying to get something done, and you were running into roadblocks, they would say, "Send the Sisters after them." Tell me about that.

STB: That was in the days, too, twenty years ago, when we were younger, and people had more energy for such. Audrey Langworthy, the senator from Johnson County, she said, "I'm hearing from all the Sisters." People know what we stand for.

JM: And you could mobilize them when you needed to.

STB: Not as much anymore. In the old days, I could. My point people are retired or gone.

JM: Apparently, given the fact that that would occasionally be called for by people who were on your side, it must have been somewhat effective when you mobilized them, right?

STB: It did. Now there are other people mobilizing people, which still—the Sisters across the state educated a lot of people. So, they have connections to us, some of them. That's also lessening. But that was an influence to remind them of the values that we hoped we taught them.

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JM: I was also intrigued by something else that you wrote when you were dealing with legislators on an individual basis, and I'm sure you got along with most of them because I know the kind of person you are, you found ways to get along and to like many of these people who you were dealing with. But occasionally you said after an encounter with a legislator, you had to "shake off the dust."

STB: Yes.

JM: What does that mean? There's a religious connotation to that.

STB: That's right. Jesus in the Scriptures at one point, "Shake the dust from [your] feet" because they weren't listening, and there were no open hearts. There's very few times, but there were a few times when I thought, "That person wants to demean me, and I'm not going in there to be demeaned. I'm just not going to do it. We can disagree and still respect each other."
[Addition by the interviewee made during her review of the transcript: There have also been times when I needed to go back to a Legislator and apologize for my judgmental statement to them.]

So, yes, those were few times, but I learned that there were sometimes when you do that.

JM: I consider you pretty much an icon. I got here slightly before you, but as I look back over my years at the Statehouse, I remember you always being here and always being a voice of reason and moderation and being respectful of everybody you were dealing with. What kind of impact, big picture, do you think you have had so far in your years here?

STB: To be honest, I don't really know. I know that I have felt called here, that I have a love/hate relationship with politics, is what I say, but I believe to the bottom of my toes about the importance of policy and what an impact it has on everybody's life, especially the life of people who are struggling and the poor. So, the Gospel, which I stand on and I am committed to, says that if we're going to be God's children, we need to take care of the poor. So, I want my voice to be that.
[Addition by the interviewee made during her review of the transcript: I find it painful to hear how some legislators speak about the poor and vulnerable and the immigrants. I do not think that I romanticize those caught in the violence of poverty, but I would like the Legislators to know some of the courageous, hardworking and compassionate people that have gifted me in my life.]

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JM: Without getting too political, we live in a time when a lot of people in politics are very much overtly religious, and yet there seems to be a disconnect between their professed beliefs and the policy they support. That's a thing now, don't you think? It's certainly a topic of discussion. How do you feel about that?

STB: I agree, and I am so grateful for the voice of Pope Francis and now the voice of Pope Leo because I think both of them talk about [how] the Gospel calls us to care for each other, and it calls us to care for the poor, and it calls us to be cautious about having too much money. To me, I stand on strong shoulders that go back to Vincent and Louise, but also today to have that, I think most people know what Pope Francis's message was, and I think a lot of people know what Pope Leo is saying because it's out there and now, he's an American. So, they can't say, "He doesn't understand our country."

JM: And you have a lot of politicians who are arguing with Pope Leo as to whether he's got the Gospel straight.

STB: Right. That's as old as Jesus. They didn't think Jesus had God straight either. They wanted all of their 600 and some laws. You needed to follow those if you were really a good Jew, and Jesus was saying, "Well, you're mixed up on this." He was the hardest on the religious leaders who were mixed up.

JM: Given the issues that you care about, immigrants, helping needy children and families, have things gotten more difficult here for you in recent years? Do people listen to you as much? Do you think they're receptive to what you're saying?

STB: I've changed how I operate as I'm older here. I feel like my job is to connect people with each other, connect people who care about the issues I care about. So, I'm not going to forty offices anymore. I want to be a connector, and I want to be a presence, but I'm kind of free flowing up here in some ways.

JM: So, you're not doing the job the same way you did when you showed up here.

STB: That's right, not the same way as forty years ago or even thirty years ago. It's just where my spirit is and where my bones are, if that makes sense.

JM: It makes sense to me.

STB: And I make it a point though, if I hear somebody on Kansas Public Radio on my way here in the mornings, I'll say, "I heard you on the radio." If they did a good job, I'll tell them they did

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a good job. Otherwise, I'd just say, "I was glad to hear you on the radio," which I was. I make it a point—I remember one legislator stood in as chair one day at one of the committees, and I said, "You did a good job," and he said to me, "Well, that means a lot to me, coming from you."

I came from a mother and father who affirmed us. Maybe that's where that comes from, but I believe in affirming people. You can't just tear people down all the time and expect them to listen to you.

JM: So, like everybody else who is a lobbyist in this building, you trade on relationships, and that's the way you build relationships.

STB: Thank you, yes.

JM: Does that sum it up okay?

STB: Yes.

JM: So, in addition to what you do here, you do other things. You still minister in prisons with inmates?

STB: I haven't ministered in prisons since COVID. That was when the Wyandotte County Jail didn't let us in anymore. They're never invited—

JM: They haven't changed it. You are a police chaplain?

STB: I'm a police chaplain.

JM: What is that? What does that entail?

STB: When I moved to Kansas, City Kansas in 1996, someone said, "Therese, you should be a police chaplain." Basically for twenty years, I carried the pager. For forty-eight hours every month, if they had something they wanted me to come to, they could page me out. I was at the scene of a lot of homicides. I was at the scene of some natural deaths. I was at the scene of some suicides. I come right to the scene.

JM: When you show up to the scene of a homicide, what are you called to do there?

STB: To be present. There's no book that tells you what to do. For me, because the officer in charge will say, "So and So, this is the mother. This is the brother. This is the uncle." Usually I

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would stand back, I pray at the scene. I always prayed at the scene because I believe God is there. I would look to see who I might be able to approach and be helpful to.

JM: Offer some comfort.

STB: If they wanted a prayer—some did, some didn't, yes.

JM: And the police find that helpful at the scene as they're doing their jobs.

STB: Yes, they would call for us. One of my favorite stories was—this was not good, but, anyway, the man who had been killed was laying on the grass, his body covered except for his shoes. There was a big crowd. Crowds come to these homicides, which I don't like, but anyway—so, I just walked up and down the yellow tape and looked for somebody to talk to. Then the sergeant got a call that somebody else had been murdered, and they wanted a police chaplain. He said, he was a crusty old sergeant, "You cannot have my chaplain!" I've always loved that. "You cannot have my chaplain." So, you hoped that you were helpful.

JM: What did you learn in those situations watching the police work in regard to how you view the police?

STB: Oh, my. The good police officers, and I tell them this, are holy.

JM: It's a tough job.

STB: They are the people who deal with the poor. They are the people who deal with the broken. The bad police officers cause a lot of damage, and we've had that in Kansas City, Kansas.

My son, Gary, is a Black man. I know. He's taught me. He has no criminal record, which I'm grateful for, he's grateful for. There's not a reason he should be a criminal. But the number of times he is stopped just for no reason. The experiences that he has had in his fifty-four years, they're multiple with the police.

JM: Let's end on that note because I want to talk to you. I know before the interview started, you and I talked about Gary. I don't think I brought him up during the interview. Let's talk about him. You met Gary when you were at St. Vincent's all those years ago.

STB: He was in foster care. When he left foster care at eighteen, he belonged to nobody.

JM: He was nine when you met him?

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STB: He was nine when I met him. I had interactions with him on and off, he and his brother. His brother went to an adoptive home, but he was not adopted. So, when he was eighteen, I maybe was in contact with him every three weeks, every month or something, but I hemmed his first pants for his first job.

JM: His first job interview you hemmed his pants?

STB: Yes. He today is a fine dining waiter in the big places, the fancy places, and he's very good at his job. But we walk the walk. I say, "You call a Bangert woman who is the third of twelve kids, you call her Mom, that's not a honorary title." We walk the walk together, and he's taught me so much, and we're a gift to each other.

JM: He's how old now?

STB: Fifty-four.

JM: And you're still—

STB: We're still, yes.

JM: It's a great story.

STB: Well, he's a gift. I've had a lot of gifts.

JM: I've really enjoyed talking to you. I really appreciate you taking the time. Thank you very much.

STB: You're very welcome. Okay.

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