A lifetime of learning for Sister Mary Diez ’67

“Life is about learning,” says Sister Mary Diez ’67, SSSF. “I used to tell my students who were reluctant to learn that if you aren’t learning, you’re ready to die.”

Learning has been a constant throughout Diez’s life, whether she was the student or the teacher. Having taught for nearly 50 years, Diez is now the student as she learns a new set of skills for her position as president of the School Sisters of St. Francis. She describes her role as a combination of CEO of an organization and spiritual leader.

Diez, who was once a French teacher, is now learning Spanish and German simultaneously to better communicate with sisters in the SSSF provinces. She traveled to Latin America last November and January to visit missions and reside over the elections. In preparation for that trip, she translated her entire presentation into Spanish. In May, she’ll travel to Gemany, so she’s currently learning the language through the help of a listening-speaking language program and work with a conversation partner.

In October, she’ll travel to northern India to visit missions. It will be her first trip to the country and she expects it to be interesting.

“It’s a very diverse culture,” Diez says. “We have missions in urban cities and ones in very remote rural areas.”

In between trips and language learning, she’s focused on creating a greater sense of unity among the provinces, which are located in India, Europe, Latin America and the United States.

“It’s hard to create a sense of unity among the sisters when we are so spread out,” Diez says.

One thing her team is doing is to feature photos and articles about the work taking place in each province in every monthly newsletter. They also recently produced a video that shares photos of the sisters working in the ministry. Putting faces to the names helps connect the sisters no matter where they are.

Although Diez isn’t currently teaching at Alverno, she remains highly connected no matter where she is. She continues to live on campus with the group of sisters she’s lived with for nearly 40 years, four of whom work at Alverno. She is also on the Vanguard Society leadership team, and she attends as many Alverno Forums as she can. She remains passionate about character education, a subject she was devoted to in her role as dean of Alverno’s School of Education.

During a visit to St. Clare School in Paita, Peru, students performed a dance program for Sister Mary Diez (top row, second from left) and Sister Maureen McCarthy, a vice president of the Congregation (far left).
Just as Diez remains a part of Alverno, the school and its lessons have stayed with her. For example, the self assessments that every Alverno woman becomes deeply familiar with have a role at the SSSF. As Diez conducts annual reviews for her staff, she is encouraging them to dig deeper and to use evidence-based information in their self assessments. Sound familiar?

While at Alverno, Diez spent a lot of time teaching students to listen to those with opinions different than their own and to invite differing viewpoints into the conversation. She’s found that in her role at the SSSF, she also has to be both a good listener and a good facilitator in helping others listen to one another.

“You take everything you’ve ever learned with you, and it has application to your new role,” Diez says. Alverno alums surely can agree with that.

~Heidi Jeter

Diez with sisters in San Marcos, Guatemala, including Sister Inés Albizures ’05, (far right). These sisters work at Rieti, a natural healing clinic.

Sisters at Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe (Guadalupe Homes), an orphanage the SSSF established in the late 1980s, in Santa Apolonia, Guatemala.