A Woman With and For Others:

Remembering Dr. Kelly Frailing

By Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

Late last year a brilliant star in the bright and diverse constellation of students, scholars, and staff members that make up Loyola University New Orleans left us. After a brief illness, Dr. Kelly Frailing, Associate Professor of Criminology and Justice and the coordinator of the Master’s in Criminology and Justice Program, passed away on December 11, 2022.

Dr. Frailing was planning to contribute an article to the JustSouth Newsletter this month about her research on the criminalization of mental illness and substance abuse and the need to do better, including funding for real mental health and substance abuse treatment system in the U.S., shorting up the social safety net, and developing a single payer health care system. Instead, we will share here a sprinkling of the poignant and comforting reflections that were offered at a December 15th memorial service for Kelly in Thomas Hall by some of the people that best knew and admired her, the accomplished scholar, dedicated criminal justice reformer, and beloved teacher and colleague.

Mr. Kurt Bindewald, Executive Assistant to the Provost, began the service by reminding us that it is in the present that we encounter God, not yesterday, not tomorrow, but today. Trusting this, Kurt suggested to place ourselves in the present moment of shock and grief and bring to God our questions, disbelief, and pain. Kurt assured that our tears were just as Jesus wept for his friend Lazarus, God weeps for us all. No one grieves alone, and when faced with life’s uncertainties, foes, Kelly’s family, friends, and colleagues have the love and support of the Loyola community.

Dr. Rae Taylor, Chairperson of the Department of Criminology and Justice, spoke of the great love and admiration she had for Kelly Frailing, with whom a deep friendship over the years had evolved to be a special “sisterhood.” Dr. Taylor shared, “You won’t hurt more for hurt people than Kelly. And no one could triumph more in others’ joy...’There was nothing she would not do to help...to lift and to teach. In support of or celebrate anyone, everyone. Any student, any colleague, any stranger. She was one for others in a way that was unparalleled and certainly irreplaceable.” In the sadness of the moment, Dr. Taylor’s height enters through the tears when she shared humorous stories of Dr. Frailing’s inimitable and quirky sense of humor.

Kelly Frailing was one of the country’s leading experts on crime in the wake of disasters and has been credited as a driving force in the development of the criminal justice system—along with her long-time colleague and former Loyola advisor, Professor Emeritus Lee Harper. Another research focus of Kelly was specialty courts that served people with mental illness and/or substance abuse. She published scores of journal articles on these topics and several books. At the memorial service, Dr. Taylor asserted, “Kelly was a genius, a real deal, [italic] heretical [italic] person.” She was also humble and unassuming. “Kelly found attention to herself intolerable. She would want to highlight everyone around her, especially her students.”

Kelly Frailing was a beloved and accomplished teacher. In 2020 Dr. Frailing received the University Senate Award for Advising for “her outstanding commitment and dedication to Loyola’s students and their success.” At the memorial service, Dr. Line Yang, Associate Professor of Psychology, spoke about observing Dr. Frailing teach a class. “She was energetic, humorous, insightful, and inventive, of course! Students were engaged, ...and the discussion wasn’t just a lot of theories, it was not just about statistics or facts. It was a conversation about real societal issues. About human desperation. About social and structural inequalities. And about justice. If we call, a call, a demand, for everyone in that classroom to take responsibility for themselves, for others, and for the systems that operate in our lives.”

Fr. Justin Dafton, Interim President, provided tender words of sympathy to Kelly Frailing’s family, especially her daughter, Matilda. Fr. Dafton thanked Matilda for her Jay. “She was the love of our Loyola family. She had several other speakers had that Kelly’s legacy live on in the contributions she made as a mother, a scholar, a friend, and a member of the Loyola community. Before the service concluded, Interim Vice President for Mission and Identity, Dr. Tom Ryan, prayed that those present be, like Kelly, people of community. Before the service concluded, Interim Vice President for Mission and Identity, Dr. Tom Ryan, prayed that those present be, like Kelly, people of community.

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The service will be livestreamed and available on a recording.

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