News
Q&As



Sr. Rosalind Gefre gives a therapeutic massage in 2018 at a St. Paul Saints minor league baseball game. From the mid-1990s to 2020, one of the team's most popular promotions was free massages from Gefre. (Courtesy of Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet of St. Paul)



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Those watching the documentary "The Saint of Second Chances" on Netflix will see a short segment on Sr. Rosalind Gefre, showing how she gave massages at the St. Paul Saints minor league baseball games.

The film documents Mike Veeck and his lifetime of second chances since he orchestrated what might be the most infamous night in baseball: the 1979 "Disco Demolition" between Chicago White Sox games, which turned into a full-scale riot. Today, Veeck co-owns the Saints and a string of other minor-league teams and is seen as the pioneer of baseball promotions, including between-innings entertainment and giveaways. From the mid-1990s to 2020, one of their most popular promotions was free massages from Gefre.

Gefre, of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, has had her own string of second chances.

The eighth of 12 children, her father died when she was 6, leaving her mother and siblings to run their North Dakota farm amid the Great Depression. It could have been the end of them, but they survived, and in 1948, she moved to the Twin Cities in Minnesota to enter the convent.

By 1968, she was a nurse working in Fargo, North Dakota. She loved the work but was beset by crushing chest pain, forcing her to sleep in a chair at night. She was convinced she was dying, and doctors couldn't find a cause. When her mother was terminally ill, Gefre moved in with her and took her to get massages. The therapist kept asking Gefre if she wanted one, and when she finally gave in, her chest pain healed.



Sr. Rosalind Gefre, now retired, was a pioneer in the field of therapeutic massage. (Courtesy of Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet of St. Paul)

By 1973, she was giving massage therapy, but it was a struggle because most people associated massage with prostitution. In the hospital where she worked, she would give patients massages so they wouldn't need painkillers or sleeping pills until administrators found out and prohibited the practice.

In 1983, she opened a massage clinic in St. Paul, only to be raided and shut down by the police department's vice squad. She even had to move out of the convent because of the disapproval of some sisters. So she worked to change the laws to differentiate therapeutic massage from the sex trade and eventually had a string of both massage schools and clinics.

Even her first two years at the Saints were a struggle — no one wanted a massage because they thought it was dirty. But once fans discovered its benefits, they lined up around the stadium to have Gefre work them over. People break down in tears,

ask her to pray for them, or just hold her and sob when she hugs them.

In 2006, the team gave away a Sr. Rosalind bobblehead, but the head doesn't move — only the hands, as if she's giving a massage. It may be the world's only "bobble hands."

The nun who was once raided by the vice squad is now featured in the Netflix documentary, the subject of a book, and can be seen being honored on her birthday in 2019 by Saints co-owner Bill Murray.

And lest you think all she does is give massages, when she was about 70, she went skydiving. In 2015, when she was 84, she jumped out of a plane again as part of a fundraiser. She would love to go once more if someone will pay for it, she says.

Now 94, she is retired but still gives massages to friends and people she meets who need her healing touch.



Sr. Rosalind Gefre (left) gives a therapeutic massage in 2017 at one of the massage clinics she started. In 1983, the police department's vice squad raided and shut down her clinic in St. Paul. She worked to change the laws to differentiate

therapeutic massage from the sex trade. (Courtesy of Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet of St. Paul)

***GSR*: It sounds like you've found that massage does much more than help the muscles and tendons you're massaging.**

Gefre: People have no idea how wonderful it is. Not only does massage feel good, but it's so healing. Just a few months ago, a lady came just to talk with me, and in the conversation, she said, "I'm dizzy all the time. I'm so dizzy." I said, "Let's get you in the massage chair." That was six months ago, and she hasn't been dizzy since.

And hugs are part of your treatment?

Practically everyone gets a hug. One of the first things I'll do is reach out and hug you. We need to be touched.

One time I was in a restaurant, and when I finished, I hugged the waitress and told her she was a good waitress. She broke down and literally sobbed. She said, "Thank you so much for hugging me. I've worked so hard all morning, and I've gotten nothing but scolding." People often thank me because they had such a hard day, and finally, someone touched them. Some people out in the world don't know they're loved. You can raise their confidence that they're important, massaging them in a way they know they're loved. Everybody needs to know they're loved. If I massaged you, you would know I love and care about you.

Clearly, you see massage as a ministry.

For me, I really love the Lord. I love Jesus a lot. A lot.

So, in my head, when I massage people, that's always Jesus that I massage. One time, a patient in the hospital had a terrible skin condition, either a disease or he was born with it. I thought, "Lord, I can't be his nurse for the day, I just can't take care of him as a patient." Then the little voice came: "You know this is Jesus, and are you refusing to take care of him?" I really shaped up and went back into the room, and he was my patient for the day. He was the nicest man. They were always Jesus for me.

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How strong are your hands?

After 50 years of massage, they're strong.

When I first started, I'd start at 9 in the morning and end at 9 at night, no problem. I was 25 years with the Saints (she retired from that with the COVID-19 pandemic), and I started at 7 p.m., and I'd be there till 10 or 10:30. That was after doing massage till about 6.

When doctors say, "Squeeze my hands," they go, "Ahhhhhh! I didn't know you were that strong!" I still don't have any hand problems or body problems. I am just a healthy person. I think massage was good for my body.

So, massage is about the whole person?

Our society is skin-hungry. And how do you stop that hunger unless you touch them? We need to be touched, we need to be hugged and we need to be loved. Something happens when you touch people.

It's the most wonderful thing when you can help someone. People would have a headache, and when they'd get off the chair, they'd say, "Oh, my headache is gone!" That was always amazing.