



## Answering the Master's Call

*Vocation Stories*

# My Child Give Me Thy Heart

By Sr. Mary Stephen Vamosy, P.B.V.M.

I grew up as the fourth child of eight—six girls and two boys. During the early years of our lives, we had our routines. The older girls helped dad with milking cows and Emily and I took care of the chickens. During the month of May, every night after supper, we knelt as a family in front of the picture of Our Lady of Lourdes with Saint Bernadette to say the Rosary. We all took turns leading the prayers and that is how we learned the mysteries of the Rosary. That picture of Saint Bernadette and Our Lady now hangs in my room at the convent.

I attended public school and went to Religious Education once a week, at my parish church of the Sacred Heart in Stamford, New York, just a five-minute walk from school. I have always believed that my parent's faith and example were the cause and nourishment of my vocation to become a sister. In my senior year of high school, I knew that I wanted to be a sister. When I told my parents, Mom cried, and Dad told her that they had always prayed that one of their children would be a priest or a sister. During those formative years, they were always happy and supportive of my desire to be a sister.

While I was discerning my vocation, my mom took me to visit the Sisters of St. Joseph in Latham, New York. Meanwhile, my sister Mary Lou

heard of a community that had an orphanage that she thought I might be interested in visiting. The name of the home was St. Colman's in Watervliet, New York. My mother again took me on the road, and we visited St. Colman's which was staffed by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The sisters originally came to the United States from Ireland in 1881 at the request of Rev. William Sheehan, the pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Watervliet. He saw the desperate need for their ministry, which was founded by Nano Nagle to work with the poor, especially children. Father wanted the sisters to care for children and to keep families of children together. In a newspaper, he had read about a young couple who met, fell in love and wanted to marry. During the marriage preparation, they found that the reason they had so much in common was that they were brother and sister who had been separated when they were younger. How sad!

When we visited St. Colman's, we were greeted by Reverend Mother Bernadette and had a wonderful visit. She gave us a tour, explained how St. Colman's was founded, what their mission was and what it was like to be a sister. I told her I wanted to be a sister. But Mother explained to us that they had found through



experience that young girls coming to enter right out of high school were not able to adjust as well as those who had experienced living on their own away from home. This period of independence she felt was very necessary. This could be achieved in a number of ways. The young women could attend college or get a job and live in their own apartment. The highlight of my visit to St. Colman's was the visit to the chapel, where I saw over the main altar, "My Child Give Me Thy Heart." I knew then that this was the place where God wanted me to be and Mom felt the same way.

Mother suggested that I go to St. Catherine's Infant Home in Albany and in the Fall, I started their year-long live-in program. It was run by the Daughters of Charity and dealt with children from new-born infants to five years of age. There were about forty other women that I joined with the goal

of becoming a childcare technician. It would take me only one year and then I could revisit the idea of becoming a sister. We all felt so important; we dressed like nurses, white uniforms, white stockings and shoes and we even got to wear a little white cap after we completed required classes! Here I made some of life-long friends that I'm in contact with, sixty years later!

The children at St. Catherine's were divided by age. We the child-care workers were also divided into the same number of groups as the children, so that we would get the experience of working with all of the different age groups. Our child-care education was very complete and intense. We learned to deal with a variety of behaviors, what to expect of each age group and the growth and development of all ages of children. This experience really helped me when I entered St. Colman's the following year.

September 8, 1962, Our Blessed Mother's Feast Day, was my Entrance Day. Joining me for my trip to St. Colman's were my Mom and Dad, my brothers Steve and Joe, and my baby sister Peggy. How I would miss them all but especially Peggy who was only four years old! Mother Bernadette and Mother Michael welcomed us and then she took me to the novitiate, where I changed into my postulant dress, stockings, cape, veil, "nun shoes," and stiff white cuffs and a collar.

What a transformation! But I would get used to it pretty quickly. My Dad was the family photographer and took pictures for the rest of my family who couldn't be with me for this happy day, to see the "Sister" now in the family. Other young ladies entering that day also got dressed in their Postulant clothes and came down to their families. There were seven of us and we called ourselves the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit! After pictures



and a short visit with our families we all went to the chapel for the Rosary. When the Rosary was finished our families left for their slow trip home.

Now I was with my new family, the Sisters of the Presentation. I knew that this was the place that God wanted me to be. As postulants we went to Maria College, a junior college, which at that time was just for religious sisters from all different communities, where we were taught by the Religious Sisters of Mercy. Then, I attended the College of St. Rose in Albany where I received my Bachelor of Science Degree in Music. As a novice, I took organ lessons and was able to practice with the sisters and the children in our home in our own beautiful chapel! The children at St. Colman's had choir practice every week to learn all the new hymns for Mass. In 1972, our day care program for two-to five-year-old's was started. I worked with each age group until I reached the kindergarten group.

As society changed and more mothers were working, it was necessary to establish nursery and pre-k programs in our parish schools. I

taught eighth, seventh, third, second, first, art and music and then finally my favorite, KINDERGARTEN!! Those twenty years of kindergarten flew by, but oh! what fun we had. Whenever I run into my former students, we share happy memories and they bring me up to date on their children and grandchildren. Just a few weeks ago, I received my last COVID-19 shot from one of my former students!

In my later years, I continue to play organ and lead the choir for our sisters. I also enjoy being a Eucharistic Minister and a Lector at Mass at our Motherhouse and being a part of the diocesan and community vocation teams. On the fun side, I am one of the "Rally Nuns" for the Siena College Men's Basketball team and enjoy attending their games and cheering them on! Go SAINTS!! People are always appreciative to see sisters wearing religious habits and stop us to talk. It brings back memories of the sisters who played very important roles in their lives and they are happy to share those memories with us. Mom and Dad's prayers have definitely been answered. One of their children has become a sister, a Sister of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I am that BLESSED one. 🙏

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