

VOCATION STORY

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As I reflect on my particular call from God, I thank God for the unique way God made God's Self known to me and called me to the consecrated life as a Sister of St. Paul de Chartres.

I was born on March 3, 1950 to Henry and Ileen Hughes of Flat Rock. I have five brothers and four sisters, of which I am the second child and oldest girl. My parents owned a dairy farm with our property just next to the church property. My parents helped in the building and maintaining of Holy Family Parish and continue to do so today, always having been active in their witness and faith and in passing it on to us kids. As a child I can remember the significance of my First Holy Communion and of being particularly attracted to holy articles, prayer books and especially a pin of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which I still have today. Church was always a priority to prepare for in our family and we attended without fail as a family, properly dressing up and following the Latin Mass with Prayer Book, hats or chapel veils and rosary in purse. Particularly interesting to me is that, as a youngster, I was attracted to a large plastic crucifix that came in the mail from the missions. I kept that crucifix in my dresser drawer all through school and when I left for college, I placed a smaller one in my luggage. To this day I carry a crucifix in my luggage and ironically the cross has come to play a very significant role in my life as a woman, a Catholic and in my life story and experiences as a Sister of St. Paul de Chartres.



Going to the public Flat Rock Elementary Grade School in Flat Rock, we had regular catechism classes during the week at church and in the Summer I remember having the Franciscan Sisters for several weeks of catechism. While I don't remember this in particular, my friends today tell me I used to say that I'd like to be a sister.... I was blessed to attend, through the sacrifice of my parents, Holy Name Catholic Central High School in Escanaba. The education, spirit and presence of the Religious Sisters and Brothers there tremendously impacted my life. It was especially the habit of the Dominicans that attracted me at that time; always wishing I could try one on. I don't remember pursuing any particular interest in sisterhood though through high school years. I was a very conscientious student and always "booked it" along with after school farm chores or house work to do. As the years passed I got a lot of experience baby-sitting, graduated in 1968, worked as switch board operator and admissions clerk at St. Francis Hospital and at the same time studied at Bay de Noc Community College in Escanaba. After completing an Associate of Arts Degree, I went on to complete a Bachelor of Science Degree from Central Michigan University in 1971. During my university years I attended church regularly on campus and also belonged to an International Student's Organization. A memorable peak experience that greatly influenced my life and relationship with God happened in lab one day after spending many hours studying fruit flies and microscopic organisms. I was profoundly enlightened and touched with the awareness that it *had* to be God who created all of life, single-celled amoebas as well as our selves! This grace has never left me and in fact gifted me with a love for the most

finite and intricate beauty of God in people, creation and the cosmos, with all of its nurturing and sustaining qualities.

I was sent from CMU to do my student teaching in Alpena, MI in the public school system and I continued working as an attendance officer at the large high school there for several years. At the same time I was asked to home-bound teach two young seventh grade country girls; Debbie Cernat with cancer and frail little Susie Golder on dialysis. This was a real and significant start to my life of ministry and service to the little ones of God in need. I learned so much from these young women and their families and I became one of them as I experienced in the long hours and many painful moments of sacrifice and suffering, their love, faith and total care. In that town as well was a woman who became a wonderful and faithful friend, Marie, who shared from the sacred space of her soul, her longing for God, her desire to serve God and be with God in all she said and did. She was a talented speed-skater who eventually had a breakdown and spent many years with severe mental illness. Her untiring, unflinching love and witness for the Lord in the face of her illness and debilitating state was a tremendous inspiration to me deeply impacting my life and future ministry. Marie died the summer of '05 from cancer; a hero who fought the good fight and won the race. She taught me the childlike trust and humility of serving God, the humor and enthusiasm for life and the joy of being in God's Holy Presence. She deeply affirmed my call to religious life and prayerfully supported my vocation; an angel of God, a saintly presence!

Having studied to be a teacher, I had sent applications out to many places looking for a full-time job. One day in the Spring of 1974 I received a call from the Menominee Catholic Central Grade School for a job interview. I immediately got the teaching position and began my move to Menominee. Some of my friends said that I "wouldn't have a good time in a Catholic School" but I had dreamed of and worked so hard to become a teacher that I made the move anyway, the call within being stronger. I taught in the MCC South building two years during which time a Franciscan Sister asked me if I had ever thought of becoming a sister. I also made a Cursillio in 1975 that changed my life - another peak experience of seeing the glory of God! I often felt deep compassion for the poor overseas during this time and had a deep desire to serve. The third year of teaching, I was asked to go to the MCC North building to teach the 8th grade. It was there that I met the Sisters of St. Paul for the first time and fell in love with *who* they were - women of great love and compassion, dedication and prayer, spirit, humor and joy. These powerful women were Sr. Marie Claire and Sr. Lucienne, and the late Sr. Cormac and Sr. Marie Regis.

While I always thought I was going to be married and have ten children like Mom and Dad, I dated a little but felt deeply drawn to service, to prayer and reflection, spiritual reading and searching for the truth - about myself, God and others. I was an active member of Holy Redeemer church at that time, teaching CCD, lector and making weekly holy hours. It was during that year that the Lord was really speaking to my heart, even through my wonderful and prayerful students who seemed to know before I did that I would become a sister. Then one day in the middle of January 1977, while teaching my 36 eighth graders, I saw a bright light in the far corner of the room that filled my whole being profoundly with love and left me in tears. I wanted to leave that very moment to become a sister. This was a touchstone experience in my life that I often come back to in time of need. It was an encounter with the Living God calling me and consecrating me to Himself. I later shared what had happened with the Sisters, with the pastor Fr. Joe Gouin, and with the deacon at the time, Paul Nomellini, all giving incredible

support and direction. Knowing I would have to complete the school year contract, I continued to pray and discern, being introduced to the SPC vocation director and Mother House in Marquette. I also spent one week living with the Sisters in Menominee to experience their community life, apostolic work and their life of prayer. This was gift and grace in discerning.

I have always had great love, support and acceptance from my parents and family in my religious vocation. It was after much personal discernment and sharing with my parents what was happening deep within and that the call was so strong I could not say 'no', that I filled out the application to enter and sent it in. It was as if a weight of 50 lbs. had been lifted from my back. (My father's cousin was a priest in the Marquette diocese and often retreated on the farm where he had a chalet and chapel.) I was accepted and entered the convent as a Postulant that summer in August 18, 1977. I entered the Novitiate August 18, 1978 and made First Profession in Chartres, France on August 28, 1980. As a Junior Sister I continued teaching in Menominee at MCCS, Departmental seventh/eighth grade from '80-'84. During this time I also studied at Northern Michigan University and completed an MA in Elementary Education. I was blessed in 1984 to study Theology at Regina Mundi in Rome, returning to Marquette for Final Profession on August 18, 1985 and then being asked to return to Rome for two more years, during which time I truly experienced the glory of God. I received a Certificate in Religious Sciences in 1987 and returned to SPC ministry in the United States District.

This is not the end of the story, the journey continues and one thing is sure - God is in the story!