

Thanksgiving to God for 50 Years of Religious Life.

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*“Each person is a love story
that God writes on this earth.
Each one of us is God’s love story.
He calls each of us by our name:
He knows us by name;
He looks at us;
He waits for us;
He forgives us;
He is patient with us.”
(Pope Francis)*



Through Him, with Him, in Him.

Recently rediscovering a book reminded me of how reflection on the vocations of Biblical characters helped me in the discernment of my vocation to Religious Life.

It was seeing the way that one of the sisters of the Congregation approached, an obviously poor child, that defined my choice of Congregation. It was ‘love each other as I (the Sacred Heart) have loved you’ in action and not just words.

Before I write more, I want to clarify that for me parish includes school as for me, they are one. I wanted to teach at the school which served our Parish so that I could be a link and help to make the school a part of this Parish.

As fifty years ago there was no internet and making phone calls from abroad was not easy, in May 1971, I was at the Priory searching for a teaching post. One morning, I asked the sisters where the children from our Parish went to school and was told St Joseph’s. Enquiring where it was, they pointed out the direction. I set off but as the hospital, with a direct short cut had not been built, it meant wandering through the streets until I found it. An application was made, an interview followed, and, once a job secured, back to France.

Hopefully, if I prepared you for First Confession and Communion, you may perhaps remember that my first few lessons were about Community and the Church. What is the Church? Leading you to realise that however useful the building is, especially if it is raining, and how much it enhances our worship, it is the people who are the Church. About how, everyone has an essential role in the Church. Each role is to be valued, and through which we complement each other. So, when I use the word parish it is in the same sense – the people. I value your roles and I hope that I have been able to compliment them.

I made my first vows in France on Sunday, 29th August 1971 and travelled back to England with my parents. The Community here was already well engaged in the life of the Parish, and I began work at St Joseph’s School on 1st September 1971. As another member of this Parish began work there on the same day, we could travel together to and from school on our bikes.

Those of you who were at my retirement party heard me speak using the words of the hymn 'The love of the Lord is the essence of all that I have here on earth'. It is certainly still so true that 'At the turn of each tide, He is there at my side, and His touch is as gentle as silence'.

My first request to parents as a preparation for their child's First Confession is to spend time at the end of each day with their child, just looking through the day and finding how God has touched their lives with His Love and thanking Him. How silently God is there, and, as I know so well, the business of our lives means that at times, He must wait patiently for us and that includes me, to say, "Thank You".

Today I am here wanting to not just stop and say 'Thank You' but also to celebrate with you God's love for me, in all my uniqueness. 'Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything' (Joseph Whelan SJ).

It is my chance to thank God for His Love not only during the last fifty years but from the time that I was born into a close family who nurtured my faith and have always supported me in my vocation.

When in 1969, I left for my two years Noviciate in France my mother was in tears as she was afraid that World War 3 might break out which would mean that I would not be able to get back to England. Also, she had watched the film about St Bernadette of Lourdes whose Noviciate had its trials and sorrows and she imagined that my Noviciate would be like that. Being my mother, she had the illusion that I was destined for sainthood!! But she did not worry for long as she soon found out that, as a small congregation, we know each other's families and they are still part our lives. I enjoyed camping with my family on numerous remote sites in the UK and a few in France. They were and still are in the background of my community life as well. I have a vivid memory of my mother and I meeting our Superior General at Victoria Station as my mother had offered to drive her to Oxford. My grandmother was in the car too, and the two sat in the back. One not knowing a word of English and the other a word of French. That did not stop them communicating, smiling, and laughing. Whenever I saw one or other after that, it was an opportunity for them to exchange a goodwill message.

In my thanksgiving for the love of God in my life, I have not forgotten His love shown to me through my sisters, past, present, here and in France. I hope that, if you did not read it three years ago, you will find out about my life with them, and the love of God shown by them in the copy of 'Remembering 50 Years' on the Parish Website.

The love of God lavished on me includes being very patient with me. There have been times when I turned from His presence, and I did not witness His love to people in my life or who I encountered. But His mercy was and is as gentle as silence. I am sure too that there were times, when blissfully unaware of my need for not just God's forgiveness, it was given by those around me silently and without my asking.

There have been times when life has not been easy, and God has given me the support of, not only my community, family, and friends, but that of the members of this Parish who have helped me through them.

Once at Mass, Father Mervyn said that he loved being here because of the people and I certainly did then and continue to echo him. My vows of poverty, chastity and obedience give me freedom to grow in my love for God through others. God in His Love, through my vocation and Congregation, gave me a Mission in such a special Parish and with many inspiring priests both in the Parish and at the Priory. I have not travelled the world, but through the people I have encountered here, the world has come to me. A chance to meet, learn from and worship with the 'people of God' from so many places, both near and far and even taste some of their food.

I have seen changes, but ones made with discernment and optimism to move forward together in a changing world. It has been and is such a privilege to worship and journey with my community and the whole Parish: all those in the past and those here in the present. I know God meets me where I am and there is no question that I have met the love of God through this Parish - through you. For that I am so grateful. God is Love and I can confidently offer Him thanksgiving for the last fifty years.

O give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love is everlasting!!

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may love you more and more.