

## Sister Mary Fallon



St. Vincent de Paul wrote that "having charity in our heart and words isn't everything: it has to be put into action." With her generous spirit and readiness to take action that will make a difference, Sister Mary Fallon's journey as a Sister of Charity exemplifies charity that goes beyond words to meet needs and change lives.

Sister Mary Fallon was born in Boston, the oldest of three children in her family. She was raised in Quincy, MA, "a great place to grow up." The beach was just a short walk down the street. Faith and charity were central to family life. Sister Mary remembers that her father, who had once studied to be a Dominican priest, was often out doing works for others as the parish President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

During her junior year in high school, Mary began to consider a religious vocation. When her mother's cousin, a Sister of Charity, came to visit, Mary took the opportunity to ask serious questions about religious life. "It just seemed that Sister Therese had all the right answers." With Sister Therese's help and encouragement, Mary entered the Sisters of Charity right out of high school and never looked back. In Convent Station, Sister Mary quickly became immersed in community life and formed close friendships with the women in her entering band.

Sister Mary, who had long desired to be a teacher, eagerly embraced the challenges of classroom teaching. Her first assignment was to teach a combined 5th and 6th grade class at St. Vincent Academy in Newark. She greatly appreciated the guidance and support offered by the sisters who were veteran teachers. "We were so fortunate because we lived in houses with master teachers, and they would always help us."

The sisters who had years of experience in the classroom were invaluable mentors as they modeled effective teaching, efficient time management, and love and caring for the students in their charge. The older sisters were also models of faith for Sister Mary. "Watching them with their spiritual reading, with Adoration ... it made such an impression on me to see their faithfulness."

After 13 years as a classroom teacher, Sister Mary was asked to serve as a school principal. Although she faithfully carried out her administrative responsibilities, she wanted to be in a ministry where she would have more direct contact with the students. Grateful for the support of the community that had previously enabled her to earn a Masters Degree in Administration and Supervision, she earned a Masters Degree in Counseling from Fairfield University and began serving as a school counselor.

Sister Mary's ministry as a school counselor presented her with many opportunities to put charity into action. The needs of a young boy and his older sister who were students at St. Patrick's School in Jersey City had a lasting impact on Sister Mary and her continuing charitable work. Sister Mary remembers that the two children came to school appearing dirty and neglected, and "my immediate reaction was, they need help." She walked home with the children after school and discovered that their mother was seriously ill and bedridden and that no one else was caring for the children. Sister Mary contacted a social worker to get their mother into a hospital and found relatives of the children who could take them in and allow them to continue at the same school.

Sister Mary's experience with these children heightened her awareness of the needs within the Jersey City community and led to a continuing resolve to do something to help. For more than 25 years, she has been

delivering turkeys to families in Jersey City at Thanksgiving and clothing, small gifts, and gift cards at Christmas. Friends from St. Pius parish in Old Tappan help to collect the items, but Sister Mary delivers them all personally. Over the years, she has developed strong ties with the families, which are headed primarily by single women. She has been gratified to follow the children who once knew her as Sister Mary, the school counselor, as they grow up and move on.

Sister Mary's ministry as a school counselor culminated with ten years at Marist High School in Bayonne. In 2013, she began serving in a new ministry as Supervisor to Student Teachers at the College of Saint Elizabeth. She loves the opportunity to mentor the student teachers, giving them the same kind of support she received from the veteran sisters years earlier when she was just beginning her own teaching career. She raves about the student teachers, who "are so well trained and compassionate." She is gratified that the College of Saint Elizabeth students receive the charism of the Sisters of Charity, which they can pass down in turn to their future students.

Sister Mary's position with the College of Saint Elizabeth brought her back to live in community with the sisters in the Motherhouse after years of living on her own. She says, "I'm so happy here. I often wish people could be a fly on the wall in the dining room, because there's so much life in that room!" Sister Mary is very active in community life, serving as Coordinator for her Mission Reflection Group and as a member of other committees. She helps the sisters from other countries who are living in the Motherhouse while they study at the College and she assists them in their schoolwork and takes them on field trips. She also sponsors three Seton Associates and serves on the Seton Associate Advisory Board. She says, "The Seton Associates are a wonderful extension of the Sisters of Charity," and she enjoys participating with Seton Associates in outreach projects.

Sister Mary says that she is a "people person." "I really love people. When I ask someone how they are, I really do care and want to know." One of the things most gratifying to Sister Mary is being able to offer prayers when someone asks her to pray for them or a loved one. "I appreciate being asked to pray in that way and I make sure that I do it, remembering the person by name."

To Sister Mary, offering prayer and doing acts of charity are simply the natural and unexceptional things that you do as a Sister of Charity. Her vocation brings her great happiness and she finds that her life is very fulfilling. In her quiet, direct way, she continues to live out the mission of charity as envisioned by St. Vincent de Paul – with charity in her heart, in her words, and most importantly, in her actions.