

Sister Maureen Corcoran

A companion on the journey . . . one step at a time

When Sister Maureen Corcoran comes across a particularly meaningful saying or verse, she writes it down and carries it with her. One of her favorite sayings is the Native American proverb, “We will be known forever by the tracks we leave.” Through her ministry as a Sister of Charity, Sister Maureen’s tracks are interwoven with those of countless children, youth, and adults. She has treasured the opportunity to walk with people on their faith journeys and help them move into deeper and closer relationships with Jesus.

Sister Maureen Corcoran is a self-proclaimed New Yorker, born in the Bronx “in the shadow of Yankee Stadium.” She was the oldest of seven children and family life was truly intergenerational. Her extended family in the lively, two family house included her grandmother, great aunt, and the family of Uncle Chris, who managed the concessions at Yankee Stadium and at the Polo Grounds. Sister Maureen’s mother modeled a life of caring and sharing. “If there were neighbors who were going to be alone for the holidays, we always had them in. And if we were out playing and my mother gave us lollipops, we always had to offer lollipops to our friends. It was learning to share by osmosis!”

When Maureen was nine, the family moved to Teaneck, New Jersey, but she maintained her identity as a New Yorker and her allegiance to the New York sports teams, particularly the Giants. Sister Maureen remembers, “I loved the Polo Grounds. When I was 12 or 13, a bunch of us from Teaneck would jump on the bus, go across the bridge, and get the subway to the Polo Grounds. We always had to go see Uncle Chris before we left.”

As a student at St. Anastasia School in Teaneck, Maureen first encountered the Sisters of Charity. She recalls, “There was something about religious life. I don’t know what it was, but it kind of tugged at my heart.” Along with two other girls from her 8th grade class, Maureen decided to enroll in the Juniorate, or prep school, of the Sisters of Charity for her high school years.

Maureen attended the Juniorate for two years and finished high school at St. Cecilia School in Englewood. As high school graduation approached, the tugging in her heart toward a religious vocation became more persistent. “I didn’t really want it, because I had my own plans. Maybe it was just to get God off my back, but I went ahead and petitioned to enter the Sisters of Charity. I really hoped that the answer to the petition would be ‘no.’”

Sister Maureen vividly remembers receiving the letter from the Sisters of Charity as it was delivered to her by her little brother on a Saturday when Maureen was working as a check out girl at the Grand Union. “Instead of a nice little thin envelope with a letter saying ‘so happy you came but not at this time,’ it was a thick envelope. I knew I would have to make a decision.” Maureen decided to enter the Sisters of Charity.

After earning a degree in English from the College of Saint Elizabeth, Sister Maureen’s first teaching assignment was to teach junior high math at Immaculate Conception School in Darlington. She remembers waiting in Xavier Center before being picked up for the drive out to her mission. “We kept driving and driving. It seemed as if we were going into the wilderness!”

Sister Maureen taught math and religion in Darlington for six years until the sisters teaching there were withdrawn. The experience of going through the final year, after the decision to withdraw the sisters had been announced, was difficult. “I was just a young sister, and it was very wrenching at the time. Now I’ve learned



through life that you need to look at the bigger picture and stretch yourself to try to understand where decisions are coming from. And even if you can't understand the decision, you walk with it.”

Sister Maureen went on to teach math at St. Catharine School in Glen Rock, before serving a year as Vice Principal at St. Aloysius in Jersey City. During these years, she earned a Masters Degree in Divinity from Immaculate Conception Seminary and enjoyed teaching religious education and becoming involved with parish life.

Recognizing how much parish life energized and engaged her, Sister Maureen decided to devote herself to full time parish ministry. She became the first Director of Religious Education at St. Michael's Church in Palisades Park, leading the religious education program that extended from kindergarten through high school. After nine years there, she served as a pastoral minister at St. Catherine of Siena in Cedar Grove for sixteen years. Her pastoral ministry continued at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Wayne. After three years working as the Director of the Vocations Office for the Sisters of Charity, Sister Maureen now serves in pastoral ministry at St. Paul Church in Ramsey.

To Sister Maureen, the most rewarding part of pastoral ministry is helping others to grow in faith. “People can always go to books to find out things they don't know, but pastoral ministry helps to draw them into a personal relationship with Jesus.” She has been blessed to help many adults go beyond the basics they learned as children and grow into a mature, adult faith.

Sister Maureen recognizes that God, not she, is the faith giver. “I am there to help people come to see God and God's love for them. Sometimes we keep our faith in our back pocket. We need to let other people know that we really treasure the gift that we have.” She adds, “I have to accept people where they are. If I can help someone take just one step on his or her faith journey, or even half a step, it's more than it would have been.”

In her years working in parishes, Sister Maureen has ministered to people at many different stages in their lives and helped to build vital and lasting connections within the parish community. She has been gratified to connect engaged couples with married couples as part of the marriage preparation program and to connect couples expecting children with parents of young children as part of baptismal preparation. She says, “Some of the friendships lasted till the kids were out of college. It was just wonderful.”

Along with preparing couples for family life and sharing family joys, Sister Maureen has also helped families deal with pain and death. She says, “People know that I want to get rid of all the sympathy cards that say ‘Sorry for your loss.’ The pain of separation and one's grief is real, but you really don't lose someone in death. You are entrusting your loved one into the loving embrace of God.”

Wherever she has ministered, Sister Maureen has been touched by the goodness and generosity of God's people. “I have been amazed by all that people do to make life better and more human for those less fortunate. Whether it's offering food, clothes, friendship, little gifts for children to give to Moms on Mother's Day Generosity speaks to others, and in giving and sharing with others, your own faith grows.”

Sister Maureen says that every so often, she reminds herself to let go of things that aren't of God and allow God's spirit to move through her. “All of us have things within ourselves that we want to hold onto but that we just need to let go.” She concludes, “I hope and pray that I can be the best reflection of God's love to others that I can be. My greatest joy is to be on a faith journey with God's people.”