

## Sister Patricia Mennor

When Sister Patricia Mennor's name is mentioned among the Sisters of Charity, it is quickly followed by remarks such as "She has such good ideas," or "She's so nice to work with," or simply, "She's great!" These sisters recognize and appreciate Sister Pat's easygoing manner, her dedication, and her considerable leadership skills, as well as her ever increasing roles on numerous committees within the Congregation. Younger than many of the sisters, Sister Pat represents the future of the Sisters of Charity as she affirms the core commitment to service and reliance on faith and community.



Patricia Mennor was one of eight children in her family in Colonia, New Jersey. Her father was Catholic and her mother was Baptist. The children went to Mass with their father and were also nurtured through the devout faith of their mother. Sister Pat says, "I grew up in the best of both worlds." One of the strongest images of Sister Pat's childhood is that of her mother sitting on the couch reading the Bible. "She always sat on the same place on the couch and she kept her Bible tucked between the couch cushions."

Although Pat was always drawn to the Catholic faith, she did not feel an immediate calling to religious life. After graduating from Colonia High School, she earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Kean University in 1981. She used her degree by working as a Medical Technologist in a laboratory in Rahway Hospital.

During this time, Pat remained active in the Church and started to attend religious retreats. More and more, she felt called to give her life to serve others. She decided to act upon this call to service by becoming a social worker and enrolled part time in the Rutgers School of Social Work. She also started to investigate religious communities.

Sister Pat says, "It wasn't like a flash of lightning. After I started the discernment process, it took years to decide." Today, her search would have been aided by the internet, but then she actually used a book with information about different religious communities. "I visited a lot of places to find a community where I felt I would fit."

After a thorough look at several communities, Pat at age 29 began the process of entering the Sisters of Charity. While a postulant at St. Thomas Convent in Bloomfield, New Jersey, she completed her studies in social work and earned her Masters in Social Work in 1989. Following a year as a novice in Seton House on the campus of the College of Saint Elizabeth, Sister Pat took her first vows in 1990.

Sister Pat's first ministry as a Sister of Charity was as a social worker at St. Joseph Hospital in Paterson, New Jersey. Here, she worked with many people who were uninsured, desperately poor, and were facing a host of major challenges. Despite their circumstances, "people always got the care that they needed, often life saving treatments. I realized that my vow of poverty helped to allow the Sisters of Charity to offer medical services to people who had nothing. It really made me understand charity in action."

Sister Pat left St. Joseph Hospital in 1992 to take a position as a social worker with the Diocese of Paterson, working primarily with the elderly. She returned to St. Joseph's Hospital in 1993 and continued there until 1999, when she began working directly for the Sisters of Charity in the Office of Lifestyle Transitions. She found it very rewarding to help Sisters transition to assisted living or nursing care and meet a variety of needs.

Sister Pat combined her ministry as a social worker with service on healthcare boards in the Bon Secours Charity Health System. "I realized that I didn't have the foundation of knowledge to understand all of the

issues presented, so I decided to study healthcare administration.” This study culminated in a Masters in Healthcare Management from the College of Saint Elizabeth in 2011. Her capstone thesis was on leadership development.

Currently, Sister Pat is the Sisters of Charity’s Assistant Director of Sponsorship and Mission Services. As she considered a departure from direct social work, Sister Pat says that “I prayed about doing this. There was a need, and I had the background to take on this work.” In her present role, she works closely with sponsored institutions, providing education for board members and other lay leaders and helping them to understand and carry on the charism of the Sisters of Charity. This training includes programs on spirituality and ethics as well as practical matters such as finance and governance.

Sister Pat appreciates the important role of lay leadership in sponsored institutions to continue the mission of the Sisters of Charity. “Along with the Seton Associates, our partners in the sponsored institutions will help us carry our mission in the future.” She points to models of many ministries founded by the Sisters of Charity that now continue the charism of boundless charity through lay leadership.

About two years ago, Sister Pat agreed to become involved with the Sisters of Charity’s ministry for justice. She works closely with Father Terrence Moran, who leads justice initiatives through the Office of Peace, Justice and Ecological Integrity. “I really didn’t know a lot about justice issues when I started, and I have certainly learned a lot.” Along with other sisters, she works as part of the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking to raise awareness of human trafficking in connection with the upcoming Super Bowl. “We have contacted hotel managers to make them aware of the issue and see if they have procedures in place. In January, we’ll distribute little bars of soap to go in hotel rooms in the hopes of getting emergency information to victims.” Also through the Coalition, Sister Pat and Fr. Terry have networked with a local FBI agent to secure food and clothing for young women rescued from trafficking.

Sister Pat views her work for justice as part of her overall commitment to service as a Sister of Charity. “I entered because of service, and I still do that. If you look at our founders, Saint Vincent de Paul, Mother Seton, that’s what they were all about.”

Sister Pat is confident that as needs change, the ministries of the Sisters of Charity will continue to evolve to meet those needs. She looks forward to many more years serving others as a Sister of Charity with the assurance that the essential elements of religious life will remain her foundation of strength and hope.

“Prayer, living in community, daily Eucharist: those are the things that I rely on to sustain me as I try to give my life to service.”