

Sister Teresa Regina Confroy



“Charity begins at home” is a maxim recognized and honored by Sister Teresa Regina Confroy. Her life and ministry give testimony to the extraordinary value of service and kindness to people close to home.

Teresa Regina Confroy was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. She was the youngest of twelve children born into a warm, caring, and lively family. “My brothers and sisters actually voted on my name,” she laughs. Teresa’s mother was a prayerful woman who instilled in her the importance of caring and concern for others. “She shared her love of God with her children,” she says, “resulting in four vocations to religious life: mine, my brothers, and my niece.” (Fr. Mark, OSB, Abbot Thomas, OSB, Sr. Elizabeth Scheick, SC).

Teresa received her early education from the Sisters of Charity, first at Sacred Heart School in the Vailsburg section of Newark and later at St. Vincent Academy. The Sisters at St. Vincent’s challenged her to examine what she should do with her life. She came to realize that she did not want to follow in the footsteps of her sisters, who went from grammar school to commercial school, work and then marriage. “I wanted to do something different with my life, to be of service, and I started to think about becoming a Sister of Charity. I knew that the Sisters of Charity were involved in many ministries and I was drawn to join them.”

Teresa wanted to join the Sisters of Charity immediately after high school. However, at her father’s urging, she first worked a year for the Prudential Insurance Company. Confirmed of her calling, Teresa entered the Sisters of Charity in 1951. The following year, she began her college education at the College of Saint Elizabeth. “I had always hoped to be a nurse and I was happy to be placed in the science track which, later, would be an important component of my studies.”

Sister Teresa was sent out to be a teacher while taking classes at the College. As a brand new teacher, Sister Teresa was assigned to St. Michael’s School in Union City to teach a class of 56 second graders. She says, “I wasn’t lucky enough to have a mentor. My only experience as a teacher was playing school with my nieces and nephews!” She did her best as a teacher, and found herself teaching the same group of students when she was moved to the fourth grade after two years and again two years later when she was moved to the sixth grade. “I always felt sorry for those children. I hope that they learned something!”

In 1957, Sister Teresa was given the opportunity to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. Five Sisters were chosen to enter nursing school; each Sister was assigned to one of the five hospitals sponsored by the Sisters of Charity. “I was privileged, really blessed, to go to St. Joseph’s Hospital in Paterson. St. Joseph’s always had and still has the reputation for taking care of the poor.” She was honored and grateful to learn from and work with Sister Anne Jean Regan, Hospital Administrator. “She was a woman of great character and compassion, a great leader and a humble, wonderful, prayerful person. She, by her example, set the whole tone for the hospital.”

While serving at St. Joseph’s, Sister Teresa continued her nursing education both on the job and in the classroom. After earning her Diploma in Nursing in 1960, she went on to earn a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing from Seton Hall University in 1963 and a Masters in Nursing with a specialty in Geriatrics from the University of Pennsylvania in 1970.

Of all the positions that Sister Teresa held at St. Joseph’s, her favorite was being in charge of the 50 bed male ward. Many people did not have insurance at that time so the patient mix included patients who were

desperately poor and others who were middle-class working people. The winters were always very busy due in part to the admission of “Sister Anne Jean’s special patients.” Sister Teresa says, “These patients were usually homeless men who had nowhere to go during the cold winter months. They came every year, possibly staying from Thanksgiving to Easter. Both the Medical and Nursing staffs cared for them just like any other patient on the ward or in another hospital unit. They got wonderful care.”

In 1981, after advancing to the position of Vice President for Patient Care Services at St. Joseph’s Hospital, Sister Teresa felt it was time for a change. At the suggestion of her oldest sister who lived at the shore, she became a Public Health nurse working for the Ocean County Health Department in Toms River. Sister Teresa appreciated the opportunity to return to direct patient care by being able to go out and care for people in their homes. “It was a way, as a Sister of Charity, to use my professional skills and give service where it was needed. In homecare the patients are the ‘boss.’ Many of my patients lived on fixed incomes and could not afford to waste medical materials. As a county nurse, I could continue to visit patients at no fee after their insurance coverage ran out if I felt they were in need of continued supervision.” Sister Teresa later agreed to serve as Supervisor of the Health Department’s many clinics and was instrumental in starting an AIDS Clinic, the only one in Ocean County.

In 1999, Sister Teresa was called upon to start a new program for the Sisters of Charity. She and Sister Patricia Mennor founded what became known as Health and Lifestyles Transition Services. They helped Sisters who were experiencing great changes in their lives, particularly because so many schools and convents were closing. Many Sisters needed assistance in making transitions to meaningful work and new living situations. Sister Teresa also helped these Sisters with their various health problems.

Beginning in 2011, Sister Teresa became the “house nurse” for the increasing number of Sisters who had moved back to the Motherhouse after local convents closed. Just as Sister Anne Jean Regan set the tone at St. Joseph’s Hospital, Sister Teresa now sets the tone at the Motherhouse as a compassionate caregiver, medical advisor, and friend to the many people who seek her help. She willingly does whatever she can, not only for the Sisters but also for staff members who come to her. “My job is to be here for others and for what they need. Sometimes it’s just a pair of ears or a little encouragement.” She laughs when she adds, “And sometimes my job means that I get a telephone call in the middle of the night and end up taking someone to the local emergency room. It’s all part of the job.”

Looking back on her years of service, Sister Teresa reflects that for her, “Boundless Charity” could be practiced wherever she was assigned. “My Mission was always there, to help whoever needed something.”

Towards Boundless Charity, the Constitution of the Sisters of Charity, states that Sisters of Charity “are called to a life of giving of our talents, our resources, ourselves, without condition and without reservation.” Sister Teresa continues to live a life of giving without reservation, and the many people blessed by her ministry of caring are grateful.