

Sister Maryanne Tracey

In each generation, the Sisters of Charity have found ways to incarnate Charity in our world.

This affirmation, from the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth 2011 General Assembly Direction Statement, is powerfully exemplified through the ministry of Sister Maryanne Tracey, who has followed the call to serve people in need.

Sister Maryanne first considered becoming a Sister of Charity as a junior high school student in Jersey City, New Jersey. She says she “kept the call in her heart” until Sister Mary Morley asked her directly whether she had ever thought about becoming a Sister of Charity. She answered “yes” and went on to become one of 76 young women to enter the Sisters of Charity in 1965.

Sister Maryanne’s ministry began in the field of education.

After graduating from the College of Saint Elizabeth, Sister Maryanne first taught in St. Mary’s Elementary School in Waterbury, CT. She later taught at Blessed Sacrament School in Jamaica Plain, MA. Presented with the opportunity to gain specialized training, she earned a degree in Special Education to help her teach children with learning disabilities. Later, in response to a need for administrators, Sister Maryanne studied at St. Peter’s College and earned a Certificate in Administration and Supervision, which she used in positions as vice principal and later principal. One of these positions took her back to Jersey City as principal of Saint Peter’s School in the parish where her mother was baptized. She also served as principal at St. Aloysius Elementary Parish School in Jersey City.

Sister Maryanne’s continuing journey in ministry led her to serve as the Sisters of Charity Vocation Director for ten years. She recalls, “I loved being Vocation Director. That was a wonderful time.” During this time, Sister Maryanne enrolled in an intensive program in Vincentian Spiritual Direction and went on to earn a Certificate in Theology from the College of Saint Elizabeth.

After ten years as Vocation Director, Sister Maryanne’s ministry came to a crossroads when she took a nine month sabbatical to reflect on the Charism of the Sisters of Charity and discern her future path of service. During this period, she engaged in hands-on work with the poor and homeless at several different locations. She became convinced of her own call to serve the poor and homeless in hands-on ministry.

Sister Maryanne credits the Holy Spirit for leading her to the Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless in the City of Elizabeth, NJ. When she learned that the Coalition was looking for someone to lead its expanding ministry to provide transitional housing and other services to homeless families, she decided to pursue the opportunity, although at the time, she was unsure that the job was really for her.

Almost ten years later, Sister Maryanne continues to minister at the Coalition. She works closely with the working homeless families who reside in private apartments in three multi-family homes. She



helps them rebuild their lives by teaching practical skills such as budgeting, searching for jobs, and planning nutritious meals. She also provides workshops in parenting and family life and oversees an active after school children's program that includes clubs such as theatre, scouting, reading, and arts and crafts.

Sister Maryanne seems to have a special talent for recruiting and engaging volunteers. People of all ages, from school students to retirees, are regular volunteers at the Coalition, and these volunteers actively recruit others. She recognizes that "people just love to volunteer. The Coalition could not function without all the volunteer help."

Sister Maryanne is passionate about her work. "I wear three or four different hats and I love it!" She is moved when "people see the apartments and just cry. For example, some people just moved in who had been living in a car. They are so appreciative." Although families appreciate and enjoy living in the Coalition's houses, Sister Maryanne is committed to ensuring that the housing is transitional and that the families will be empowered to move on and be successful on their own. She says, "The day people move in is the day they start to get ready to move out."

As part of her work, Sister Maryanne interacts with others to see that clothing, food, and other donations are delivered to those in need. She is adamant about recognizing and preserving the dignity of the poor, which goes far beyond delivering donations. "The Sisters of Charity strive to make life more human for people, and that's how I want to operate. What can I do to make life better for people?"

In addition to her work with the homeless, Sister Maryanne also serves as a spiritual director, retreat leader, and Formation Director for the Sisters of Charity. She says the question she is most often asked is not "why did you enter," but rather, "why do you stay?" For her, the key is the Sisters' shared commitment to the poor and their respect for human dignity. "We all are committed to using our different talents and gifts to serve people in need. The Sisters of Charity have always been encouraged to be themselves, to pursue their passions and to go on for education to allow them to carry on the mission and the Charism."

Sister Maryanne wants people to know how much she enjoys living as a Sister of Charity. "We know how to celebrate!" She stresses that "being a Sister of Charity is still a viable way of living and loving God." She is confident that the Sisters of Charity will continue in new ministries as they respond in hands-on ways to meet people's changing needs. "We have always kept the Charism of Charity before us and we'll always do that in the future. It's our priority and our legacy."