

Sister Marion Scranton



To Sister Marion Scranton, living the mission of charity means walking with people and taking the time to really see and listen to them. She has always been motivated by St. Vincent de Paul's call to proclaim the Gospel by serving those who are poor and on the margins. With renewed focus on her own spiritual life, Sister Marion says that she is "on fire" as her ministry to others flows from her ever deepening relationship with God.

Marion's faith journey began at home, where she was the fifth in a family of six children. Her upbringing was influenced by her parents' living through the Great Depression. She says, "Being Catholic, frugal and thankful for what we had was part of our DNA." Marion attended All Souls School in East Orange. She remembers that the Sisters of Charity who taught her were very "human, relaxed, and fun!"

During her high school years at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Marion was active in the Sodality of Our Lady. Sodality had a motto, "Prayer and Work," that Marion took to heart. While still in high school,

Marion became active in service, teaching fourth grade CCD and traveling to the housing projects in Newark to meet with a little girl whose medical condition prevented her from attending classes to prepare for her Holy Communion.

Sister Marion reflects that "in most ways, I was an ordinary teen of the fifties. I loved to sing and dance and be funny!" What certainly distinguished Marion from most "ordinary teens" was her call to religious life. With confidence and great hope, she entered the Sisters of Charity following high school graduation and was prepared to "leave the world," at least for the period of her novitiate, and focus on God alone. She says, "Becoming a Sister at that time was a call to a very traditional way of life. But the seeds of loving God more deeply were being planted."

Sister Marion earned her undergraduate degree from the College of Saint Elizabeth, where she majored in Spanish. In her early years of teaching, she used Spanish to relate to the Spanish-speaking parents of many of her students. She went on to teach high school Spanish at Immaculate Conception High School in Montclair and Saint Vincent Academy in Newark. Her teaching reflected her belief that you cannot teach a language without including the history and culture of the people who speak that language. She especially loved interacting with the high school students and having the opportunity to teach them more than academic content. "I could teach them about diversity, about discrimination, about poverty. I loved the kids, and I learned so much from them."

Sister Marion's life in ministry was influenced by the social changes of the 1960's and the reforms of Vatican II. She says, "Vatican II demanded that we return to our roots, take risks and focus on the 'needs of the world.'" Along with other Sisters, Sister Marion began to read the writings of people such as Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and some of the leaders in Liberation Theology. She says, "We moved beyond the more rigid ways of looking at spirituality and we were challenged to respond to the changing needs of the times."

Sister Marion spent several summers during the school terms living in the Columbus Homes projects in Newark, where she volunteered in programs to help women and keep children safe. She says, "I brought my knowledge from my summers in the city back to my secondary classroom, and I began to bring students with me to help." She later spent nine summers as an Outreach Worker to aid Hispanic migrant workers on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

In 1994, Sister Marion's ministry transitioned from secondary education to health care. In St. Mary's Hospital in Passaic, NJ, and Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth, Sister Marion creatively and compassionately worked to educate and empower people from all segments of the community. She developed community outreach programs to benefit children, families, and seniors in ministries she described as "from the womb to the tomb." It was especially rewarding to enable women to see that they had talents and skills and that could teach each other. "Maybe they didn't have a college degree, but they had things they could share. It was a real watershed moment for many of them." During her years at St. Mary's Hospital, Sister Marion also studied pastoral care and became certified as a chaplain.

Sister Marion says that one of the most significant things that ever happened in her own spiritual life occurred two years ago when someone suggested that she study at the An Croi Wisdom Institute to become a spiritual guide. An Croi translates to "of the heart." Studying at An Croi has helped Sister Marion recognize that "in order to be a spiritual guide to others, you first have to know a lot about yourself and your own relationship with God." She is profoundly grateful that An Croi gave her a new and deep appreciation for contemplation. "An Croi got me to take time and make time to look at my whole spiritual journey with God. I'm on fire because of that, and I feel it's one of the best things I ever did."

In some ways, the Sister Marion who today is "on fire" with the Spirit is still that same teenager of the 1950s who loved to sing and dance. She takes great joy in life, in people, and in all the wonders of God's creation. She says, "I love my family. I love to meet people. I love to laugh, and I really love to dance!"

Sister Marion is excited about beginning a new ministry as Chaplain on a hospice team with Barnabas Health Home Care and Hospice. She says, "I feel like there are still seeds being planted in me. And I know they will grow where they will blossom and bear fruit at the right time." She embraces what some might call her "wisdom years," with stillness and contemplation essential parts of her day. As her journey continues, Sister Marion strives to live out the words found in Micah, "To act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with my God."