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Mary Lyman, RSCJ

The eldest of ten children, Mary Lyman was born in White Plains, New York on October 30, 1939 into a devoted Catholic family. The large family “kept outgrowing either [her] father’s job or the house [they] were living in,” so Sister Lyman moved around a lot as a child. From the suburbs of New York to Maryland and finally to Michigan, no matter where they were living at the time, she and her nine siblings always attended Catholic school. For Sister Lyman, this included both the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Greenwich, Connecticut and Stone Ridge Academy of the Sacred Heart in Washington, DC.

A particular all-school retreat during her time at Stone Ridge sticks in Sister Lyman’s memory. She recalls this retreat because of the “funny feeling” she felt. After asking a classmate—now Sister Clare Pratt, RSCJ—about this feeling, Sister Pratt told her that she had felt the same feelings and came to recognize it as a vocation. Sister Lyman then spoke with Mary Beth Tobin, RSCJ, who told her that if she had a vocation, God would make sure she knew. Soon after, the feeling went away and Sister Lyman went on to graduate from St. Philip High School in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1957.

While a student at Manhattanville College, then operated by the Society of the Sacred Heart, Sister Lyman felt that now familiar “funny feeling” return, this time with more force. At first she was not too excited about her call, but she knew from her parents that, if she did God’s will, she would be happy. So she accepted her vocation, but didn’t know how to choose where she belonged. It turned out to be a priest visiting the family who unknowingly showed her the way. He encouraged her to choose the place where she was attracted spiritually. Now, there was no question, as she had always been drawn toward the spirituality of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Sister Lyman made her first vows on March 9, 1964 at Kenwood in Albany before beginning her classroom ministries at the Sacred Heart school in Grosse Pointe, Michigan as the Surveillante General. Her next seven years were spent at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Greenwich teaching high school. In 1977, she continued high



Sister Mary Lyman

school teaching, only now at the inner-city school in Detroit, St. Martin de Porres. In 1983, Sister Lyman began a pastoral ministry, beginning at Christ the King Parish in Detroit, a city she now loved. A city in which, even after being away for almost thirty years, she still feels as though she left a piece of herself behind.

Continuing with pastoral ministry, Sister Lyman moved to New York City and trained as a chaplain at Cabrini Medical Center and New York Presbyterian Hospital. She then began working with the elderly and infirm members of the Society of the Sacred Heart as the Pastoral Care Minister at Kenwood. In 1995, Sister Lyman began the role of Director of Religious Education at the Sacred Heart Parish in Lexington, Massachusetts. As this parish was one that was slated to close in 2004, all of the parishioners, especially the pastor, worked hard to keep it open. Upon the parish merging staffs along with another, Sister Lyman switched her focus to spiritual direction and leading retreats, which she continues today.

Sister Lyman believes that St. Madeline Sophie would be very happy with the Society today. She founded the Society to meet the needs of the time. As needs have become more complex, so have the ways of dealing with them. However, one thing remains clearly the same—that we are still called to be on Earth, the Heart of God. As she said in a recent reflection, “To be God’s Mercy, strength, compassion, generosity, understanding, God’s unconditional love—to be all that, is our call... God loves us with a human heart, a wounded heart. Doesn’t each one of us have a heart that has been wounded in some way? He invites us to become like him and to share his mission.”

*Sister Lyman recently celebrated her Golden Jubilee with family and friends. She shared her **reflection** with us.*

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