

Embracing Change Through Vatican II

an interview with Marie Doyle, CSJ

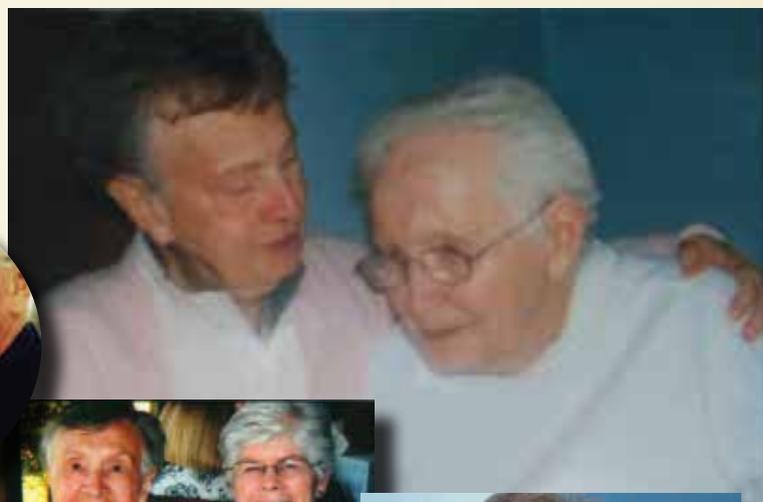
Prior to Vatican II, when ministries were assigned and education directed, Marie Doyle, CSJ recalls waiting expectantly for her choice of teaching subjects. "My first choice was psychology, second was theology, and my third choice was English. Well, I was offered science or mathematics." Confused, she asked why and was told chemistry teachers were needed. Marie accepted the challenge, and though she did not love the subject, she learned to respect it. "Chemistry was good to teach because it has many aspects: labs, history, mathematics, and theory," she said. This would be Marie's last directive given before the birth of Vatican II propelled her towards the ministry she loved.

Marie, the oldest of six children was

born in Wakefield, MA, to Frank and Agnes Doyle. Her childhood was nurtured through the teachings of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Her family belonged to St. Joseph Parish, Wakefield; she attended St. Joseph Elementary School, and graduated from Mount Saint Joseph Academy, Brighton. Her childhood experiences undoubtedly influenced the life-long journey she would begin. "While in high school, I thought about marrying and having kids," Marie said, "then I thought maybe there was something else . . . It was the choice of two goods, but I decided, the choice for me was to enter."

The CSJ community welcomed Marie in 1944. After the novitiate, she taught at St. Paul, Cambridge. After graduating from Regis with a

BA in Chemistry in 1955, she taught at Matignon High School, Cambridge, and then at Mount Saint Joseph Academy. Not an unusual story for any Sister of St. Joseph, but things were about to change. In the summer of 1956 Marie said, "I was sent to the University of Notre Dame, IN, to obtain my masters in chemistry. I loved that place. It was a wonderful experience. There was a freedom there! I was exhausted coming into the campus, but the fatigue almost melted right into the ground - I felt new life beginning. This predated Vatican II, but they were doing liturgies the way we do them now, the students and educators were involved in third-world countries - it was a whole other vitality. I thought it was right."



In the fall of 1965, Marie was missioned to Arlington Catholic High School to teach chemistry. She was responsible for senior home room, where she helped guide young students towards their college endeavors. It was a lot of work, often teaching seven classes a day, but the exhaustion did not hinder the excitement of Vatican II, and the changes that were taking place in the Congregation and in the world. In 1971, she began a part-time ministry at the Religious Education Institute at Boston College. Marie said, "While working at the Institute I exchanged labor for education. I designed a holistic training for teams of lay leaders, which was held at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Cambridge. The school then hired me to work with its sabbatical program. I loved that. The people that came to the institute, men and women religious from all over were people who were moving, evolving with that same joy I was experiencing. The bonds formed there were deep. I started a women's group about 38 years ago at St. Eulalia, Winchester, and we still gather. The women now live in different states; yet we have a retreat at least once a year." In addition, Marie volunteered at Symmes Hospital, Arlington, in the Hospice Program. "I found I could deal with death and not be afraid. This was a wonderful gift." Marie worked part-time, two-days a week for about 13 years in this capacity. She also filled in as chaplain at Boston College when asked.

During this time things were also changing in the Congregation. Marie recalls, "We had an experimental period at the beginning of Vatican II – we could request ways of living, living out in the community, in which the Dear Neighbor was literally, the neighbor. Five of us wanted to start a small group, so we applied and were accepted. It was so much fun to come home, turn the key in the keyhole and say, 'This is my home.' There was a shifting going on from our being kids to being responsible grownups. We had to take responsibility for our lives and for the cost of things. Some of the sisters were very cautious – change frightens people. Change frightens me, but I have perhaps been a change-agent."

So, embraced by the changes Marie and her group were experiencing, they were welcomed at St. Eulalia, Winchester, as their new parish. St. Eulalia, was, with the help of Rev. Joseph W. Lyons, about to implement changes stemming from the Vatican II documents. Marie had met Fr. Joe previously and felt, "He knew **we were the church.**" In a recommendation dated May 5, 1980, Fr. Joe recalled, "We marshaled a team composed of several persons to establish the firm foundation so necessary for future parish life. Within this team I mentioned Sister Marie as the outstanding change-agent and initiator, without whom a significant dimension of knowledgeable background would have been lacking." Eventually, he asked Marie to

Ann Conway, CSJ - A myriad of new values and ideas came out of this Council. Our vocabulary increased as we grew to understand, at deeper levels, terms such as: collegiality, possibility, collaboration, subsidiarity, consensus building, and empowerment. We learned the importance of these concepts through study and conversation.

do parish work. He wrote, "Her ministry embraced visitation of the sick and the elderly, the bereaved and the needy. She initiated courses on *Death and Dying, The Church, Scripture, and Modern Morality*. As a Eucharistic minister, Marie brought Word and Sacrament to the lonely and the isolated. She conducted retreats, weekend encounters, and many workshops that gave parishioners a new sense of community and purpose. . . . Sister is a deeply spiritual, prayerful person, who unostentatiously brings Christ wherever she goes, because He is so much a part of her life." For Marie, working with hospice, working with all people, and embracing change has been thoroughly fulfilling.

There definitely was a dividing line in Marie's religious life – before and after Vatican II. The after would not have been half as sweet without the before - each a blessing. And now, retired since the age of 79, Marie continues to relate with people, keeping in touch with friends and family. "I'm rich in relationships. I've had such a wonderful life."

Q. What impact did you experience when wearing a habit was not required?

A. On some level, people were finally looking at who I was. Sometimes I would introduce myself as Marie Doyle, a Sister of St. Joseph not, I'm Sister Marie. For me, it was getting off the pedestal. Pedestals are poor places to stand, and you can fall off them so easily.

It makes a big difference with many, many people. It makes a difference in what lay people feel they can talk about and the freedom to be themselves. †