

Sister Virginia O'Connell, CSJ



"If you have a dream, give it all the prayer you have and it will happen in God's time." S. Virginia

I was born in Dorchester, where my parents, John and Katherine (Walsh) O'Connell, welcomed into the world their fourth child. Born with a hare lip and cleft palate, the Doctor's advice to my parents was "Give her plenty of love and no sympathy and she will be fine." My parents always did their very best by me while many visits were made to Children's Hospital for surgeries. On a happier note, my life was filled with extended family living all around us and I was happy.

When I was four, we moved to St. Ann's Parish in Neponset where Sr. St. Dorothy was my first teacher. I was shy because I knew my speech was not good and some kids made fun of me and that was hard, but, when I got home my mother would give me a great big hug, a cup of tea and something homemade and the two of us would have a special time together.

I loved the Sisters of St. Joseph and I was in the choir, the Band, and in all the plays at St. Ann's. I went to Mt. St. Joseph Academy to continue my education with the CSJ's. During high school, I thought about entering the Community but knew I might have to have surgery again so I put it on the back burner. I graduated, found a job, and waited for another procedure, but the doctors decided it would be too dangerous.

Putting all that behind me, I decided to keep going forward, changing jobs, meeting new people. And, whenever a doctor, therapist, or anyone asked me what my dreams for the future were, I would tell them I wanted to be a teacher or librarian, and they would say "I don't think you could do that realistically." And I would say to myself, I can do it, and I will do one of these things. I knew God made me that I may love and serve Him and He would see me through.

At the time, I was working at the State House in Boston, had just graduated from Boston College and, was about to begin graduate courses when a priest friend said "You have a vocation." We talked and I prayed about it and I went to see the Reverend Mother. On September 8, 1962, I entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston.

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August 1969 brought me to Marian High School in Framingham as the Librarian, an assignment I truly loved. On the first day, I was with Sister Denisita looking out at the students arriving and I said "How am I ever going to know these students by name?" That day I began my quest to love them, learn their names, and realize they were the future and I had to do what I could to enable their dreams to come true. I attended all the hockey/ basketball games and was the Moderator for the Mother's Guild. I made some wonderful friends during my 15 years at Marian and have had the privilege of being with them in joy and sadness.

In 1984 I was missioned to Newton Catholic where I was Business Manager and also revamped the Library. This was my first time in a Parish setting and I served as Eucharistic Minister, and was a member of both the Liturgy and Social Committees. All of these experiences helped me grow spiritually.

The year 1989 called me to St. Rose, Chelsea to be Director of Religious Education for Grades 1-12. I was in charge of English and Vietnamese Children. In 1993 I was missioned to Matignon High School in Cambridge as Librarian and Media Specialist, also working in Guidance and teaching Theology. I loved my years there working with students from various cultures, backgrounds, and countries. Matignon's motto is "To Be Christ Bearers" and that has always been a way of life that I have tried to live out in my own life.

I want to thank all of our Community Benefactors for all you have done and continue to do for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston.

Your financial support makes possible all our Community does for us and please know we are very grateful. You are always remembered in my prayers. On September 8th, I will celebrate 58 years in the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston. I took time to make that step; it was not always a straight path. I knew God loved me and He called me by name. I never gave up hope. If you have a dream give it all the prayer you have and it will happen in God's time.