



Sr Patricia Harrison

I am Sister Patricia Harrison and I've been a Daughter of Charity since 1956. It seems like yesterday that I set out from my home in the middle of the North York Moors to begin my training as a Sister in St. Vincent's School for the Blind and Deaf in Tollcross, Glasgow.

As a child, I felt God was very close to me as he was to my parents. A missionary priest came to our village school when I was about 9 years old and from then on, I knew I wanted to help others too. I went to school with the Daughters of Charity at 11. The Sisters were a caring and happy group. Their community and prayer life attracted me very much. Sometimes, I would go with one of them to visit the elderly people in a home nearby and often the Sisters would give a sandwich and cup of tea to the homeless men who turned up regularly on the doorstep. I was always struck by the respect and affection of the Sisters on these occasions.

When I was 17, I was up on the moors one day and I felt full of gratitude to God for the lovely place I lived in and for my happy family. It was almost as though God said to me, "Now that I have given you all this, will you do something for me? Will you go and give my love to those in the cities who have not been so lucky? I said "Yes" so at 18, I went to become a Sister, determined to give it a try. My father told me that if it didn't work out, there would always be a place for me at home and that gave me the courage to go ahead. It did work out and my life has been a very full and happy one with far more challenges and surprises than I could ever have imagined. I spent a lot of it in secondary schools in London and Darlington and in my early days, I taught almost every subject!

In the late '70s I moved to our school for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Liverpool. I loved teaching those children who had so many odds stacked against them. I couldn't use any visual aids or the blackboard and everything had to be produced in Braille or various sizes of large print. We taught in small groups and this meant there was a lot of personal interaction between the children and the teacher. I learnt to read Braille with my fingers so that I could understand better the difficulties the children were experiencing. It was a challenging and exciting time.

In 1991, I was asked to go to Ethiopia to help in training girls who wanted to be Sisters. This too was a challenge as the culture was so different from my own. I was brought face to face with dire poverty and the simple dignity and generosity of the people in sharing the little they had with all in need made me question so many of our Western values. By the time I returned to England at the end of the '90s our Ethiopian Sisters were ready to do their own training and the Province was run by them. I came back to Darlington where I became part of a parish team helping to organise parish groups and visiting the lonely, bereaved and housebound elderly people. This time I was 11 years before I was moved once more at the age of 75 to Christopher Grange in Liverpool. Here I am "semi-retired" which means I am still able to do some part-time active work though my main mission now is "prayer and presence." My active time takes me twice a week to St. Vincent's School to teach braille to about seven of the children there. I take them individually and am very happy to find that I can still read braille with my fingers. I also edit our Province Mission Newsletter which gives up-to-date information about our Sisters and their work in Ethiopia and Kenya.

All through my life, I've felt a great love for St. Louise de Marillac, our Foundress. She had so many problems to face but that didn't stop her from having a place in her heart for the neediest. I too feel challenged to that special caring for those who are sad, lonely or deprived. Truly, "the love of Christ leaves us no option" and I am so happy to belong to a community for whom that is a reality.