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Dear Friend,

In the heart of every missionary is the desire to change conditions for the better and build relationships. How many ways are there to be a missionary? Sister Dorothy Schroeder (Sister Mary Dennis) had one idea about this when she entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in 1932. That idea was to be a foreign missionary. Our congregation's mission in China was relatively new and she had hoped to be part of that. But even though Sister Dorothy was "missioned" every year of her 55 years in active ministry and spent 16 years in very active volunteer work, she never left the United States. She also never stopped being a missionary.



The fifth of 10 children, five boys and five girls, Sister Dorothy was born in West Allis, Wisconsin, in 1913. The family moved to Eagle, Wisconsin, two years later and at first lived in a rented house on Diamond Hill. The hill was so named because a diamond had been found on the property. It had been taken to Washington, D. C. for appraisal but later was stolen. All this took place long before the Schroeders' arrival in 1915.

Mr. Schroeder was a carpenter and contractor and had moved his family from West Allis because of greater opportunities in Eagle. He was very instrumental in the development of Eagle and, in addition to his business, he built a house to accommodate his family across the street from the Catholic Church. When the children had grown up and moved away, he built a smaller house for himself and his wife.

Sister Dorothy attended grade school and two years of high school in Eagle. For her last two years of high school, she was a boarder at St Mary's Academy in Milwaukee. Her mother was also a significant teacher for her in helping her learn to cook, iron, garden, and watch over her younger siblings.

At St. Mary's Academy, Sister Dorothy met the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi for the first time. She wasn't thinking of being a sister until her piano teacher, Sister Margaret Mary Ziegler, asked her what she wanted to do



Above: As a student in 1931, Sr. Dorothy helped in the library at St. Mary's Academy.

Below: Graduation from St. Mary's in 1932.



with her life. And then followed up this question by suggesting she think about entering the community. Sister Dorothy entered on September 7, 1932. On August 12, 1933, she became a novice and received the name Sister Mary Dennis. (After the second Vatican Council, she changed her name back to her Baptismal name.) On August 12, 1935, Sister Dorothy made her profession of vows, which means that this summer she will celebrate her 75th Jubilee of Profession.

What sows the seed of an idea like being a missionary? "It was probably something I read about heroism and courage that prompted me to think about being a foreign missionary," Sister Dorothy says. "Some of the sisters were going to China and I wanted to go with them." But first would come her professional training.

She started work on her bachelor's degree in education at St. Clare College (now Cardinal Stritch University). Her first "mission" was Parkston, South Dakota, where she taught 7th grade for two years and then moved into high school teaching for 31 years, although teaching, and especially high school, was not her first preference. Since Sister Dorothy loved going to school herself, she had a love of learning to impart to her students in addition to the subject matter of algebra, biology and English.

Her leadership ability was recognized and she was often the principal of the schools where she was teaching in addition to being the superior in the local convents. While she would not have chosen these positions, they gave her the opportunity to create change and make improvements. One example of this is the introduction of modular scheduling at the high school in Sterling, Colorado, following her training in this new approach in Spokane, Washington.

After her long career in secondary education, Sister Dorothy had the opportunity to pursue her interest in Montessori education. This interest had begun during her graduate studies in education at Marquette University, and in 1969, she went to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for training. The nine years following in which Sister Dorothy taught in



Sr. Dorothy is pictured here working with children at the Montessori Assumption Training Center in 1970 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Montessori settings were her most favorite years as an educator. She found the young children so full of ingenuity and curiosity, and they were like little sponges soaking up everything they could learn.

One day in her classroom in the predominantly African American neighborhood of Englewood in Chicago, Sister Dorothy could see out of the corner of her eye a commotion going on and some students beckoning her to come over to their table. "What do you need?" she asked. "We are having an argument," one said. So Sister Dorothy asked what the argument was about. The child responded, "We are arguing whether you are black or white." Sister pulled up her sleeve and asked, "What color is this?" The answer was "white." "Well then, I'm white," she stated. "See, that's what we said," chimed in one of the boys.

Young children require a lot of energy so when it became more difficult for Sister Dorothy to match their energy, she changed her focus of ministry and trained in clinical pastoral education. This was followed by a pastoral position at the former

DePaul Rehabilitation Hospital in Milwaukee. Here she heard the heart-wrenching stories of people who were addicted and seeking to change their lives. She says she will never really know how much she was influential in helping to change their lives, but what matters is that she was in a position to try.

In 1987, an opportunity arose for Sister Dorothy that would perhaps be the closest to her original desire to be a foreign missionary. She and Sister Esther Hofschulte moved

to Tunica, Mississippi, to minister to people who lived in some of the poorest conditions in the United States. Segregation was still quite active at that time, and the sisters were watched as they worked with the African Americans. They focused on tutoring so that, through education, the persons they worked with could better their lives. The sisters also brought a passion for justice

Sr. Dorothy (r) posed for this photo with Sr. Dolores in 2001 outside the correctional center in Philadelphia.





Sr. Dorothy's parents, Andrew and Anna Schroeder.

along with care and concern, and they worked in whatever way they could to help improve the conditions in which the people lived.

When it was time for retirement, Sister Dorothy moved to Glenside, Pennsylvania, and lived with two other sisters. Here, she and Sister Dolores Gergen were involved in prison ministry two days a week. On Tuesdays they tutored and on Thursdays they did faith sharing with small groups. Part of their volunteer work also involved helping women coming out of prison as well as going to court with battered women to help them testify.

In addition to their volunteer activities, the sisters participated in a group for men and women called "Anchor." Once a month the group met, and retired professors and other renowned people gave lectures for enrichment. This was a valuable opportunity for learning as well as getting to know others in the Philadelphia area.

In July of 2007, after an extraordinarily long life of active ministry and volunteer work, Sister Dorothy moved back to Milwaukee to Clare Hall. Her decline in health necessitated moving to the Motherhouse in May of 2008.

Of her dream to be a foreign missionary, she says that she realized at one point that it was an event that wouldn't happen, so she would do as well as possible wherever she could. And each year, in keeping with our tradition in community, she was "missioned," sent to a place to serve. Later, when sisters had the opportunity to discern with

others where it would be best for them to serve, Sister Dorothy chose to work among the poorest in today's society. She has hope for the future of religious life if we turn to the poor, the sick and the dying. Wherever we serve out of love, we are truly missionaries in God's eyes.

In recognition of all of our sisters who have served others generously and tirelessly, would you consider a donation to help them in their retirement now? Our retired sisters still serve in a ministry of prayer and presence, and the intentions of all of our benefactors and donors are remembered daily. Your generosity is appreciated and valued.

Sincerely in Christ,

Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF



(l to r) Sr. Mary Jeanne Ansel, Sr. Dorothy and a relative of Sr. Mary Jeanne, visited New York in 1999, when the Twin Towers were still part of the skyline.



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