

Sister Mary Martin Colbert, SSND - 70 Year Jubilee!



"I never expected to be around this long! When I was a young sister – I came from the Chicago area – we didn't see many golden Jubilarians. They just didn't live that long. And now it's the golden Jubilarians who are the young ones, and those of us who are older are still hanging around, which is unbelievable to me!

My years of ministry in Africa were where I grew up and really learned what it meant to be a School Sister of Notre Dame. I was in the first group of three sisters who went to Kenya in 1974. The bond created between the three of us is enduring – we were the first to go, and we had to deal with a life we could not have known. We didn't have a clue. Each of us absorbed it in our own way.

It was such a different way of life. I loved working with these women who lived so simply. The experience made me the person I am today. When we went to Kenya, our vision was to teach the girls, because we knew they were not being educated. We felt they had a right to more. If they had an education, they might have other options than being married off at a young age.

The women appreciated our desire to share our charism with them, and to not only allow but encourage them to live it out as Kenyan and, subsequently, Nigerian women. That was a critical piece for us – we did not want to turn them into Americans. That's what we longed for – we didn't want the young women to lose who they were; it was very critical for us.

It has meant so much for me now to see that the sisters in Africa have discovered how to live out our charism in their own countries. The SSND African Province exists in its own right now. I'd go back tomorrow. They know that is where my heart is.

At this point in my life, I still try to live as simply as I can. I don't need a lot."



Nancy Colbert was born on September 29, 1929 in Chicago. She is one of two girls and one boy born to parents, Bertram Colbert and Grace Braeckman, both natives of Chicago. She professed first vows on August 11, 1949 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and was given the religious name Martin de Porres. Sister Martin, as she became known, ministered as a teacher and administrator in Catholic schools throughout the Milwaukee and Chicago areas for more than 20 years before embarking on missionary work in Kenya and Nigeria, where she lived and worked for 20 years. In between those years, Sister Martin was involved in community service and the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office in Chicago. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Mount Mary College in 1957 and a Master of Arts in Sociology from Marquette University in 1965. She currently resides at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, Connecticut.

