

Sister Mary James Brian Schammel, SSND - 50 Year Jubilee!



...by far the greatest joy of my life has been living with my Sisters who are dedicated and committed women to our call: Love Gives Everything.

My favorite memory is my profession of final vows at Villa Assumpta on August 26, 1978. All the Sisters in the house and from around the Baltimore area celebrated this sacred occasion with me.

My Mom, Dad, Grandparents and Aunts and Uncles - who were all still living - were able to celebrate with me. During the Liturgy, I remember the steeple bell ringing - we received word that a new Pope, John Paul I, had been elected. After the Mass my family and many of the Sisters headed down to St. Jane Frances in Riviera Beach, where I ministered, to continue the celebration with the parish.

My ministry at St. Jane Frances was my favorite and where I served for nearly 30 years. The parish covered a large beach community in Anne Arundel County near the Baltimore City line where the SSNDs began serving in 1948. Nine of us lived in the Convent in 1971 when I started my ministry teaching grades four and five. I loved the area and the people because it was so much like the area I grew up in Middle River, making it easy for me

to fit in. I could talk fishing, crabbing, and boats with parishioners and children. I spent my 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's growing along with the parish and school. When computers started to show up in schools, I found my real passion. Working with a local family business in the area, I was able to acquire 30 Apple II computers to start computer classes for the entire school, Kindergarten through eighth grade!

Having gone to St. Michael's Business School, my first contact with SSNDs, I knew how to type and therefore implemented it into my classes. As computers became more advanced into the 90s, the school began an after school newspaper program. We had reporters for every grade. The junior high editors would meet with the reporters each week during the school day and gather interesting happenings in their classes.

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Sister Mary James Brian Schammel, SSND - 50 Year (Cont'd)

The editors and teachers would meet with me after school to go over the articles. Copy writers, eighth graders, would type and prepare the paper to be printed. In my 50s when I left St. Jane Frances to go on sabbatical, I felt confident that I had helped guide them into a future that would continue to flourish. Today the school has a fully functioning computer room with a 3D printer and laptops and Smartboards are in each classroom.

After my sabbatical I was called to another exciting ministry working at Caroline Center in Baltimore City. Caroline Center is located in the area where Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger and Mother Caroline Friess were called by St. John Neumann to begin schools for German immigrants. I was so excited to be using my computer skills to help women get out of poverty by learning new skills. Caroline Center was in its infancy when I started. This group of wonderful School Sisters had the vision to carry Blessed Theresa's charism in a new direction. The women were drawn from the same areas where Theresa and Caroline had gathered immigrant children to learn and grow. Leaving there was

not an easy decision but for health reasons I could no longer continue.

Taking a year for healing at Villa Assumpta opened up another opportunity for me to build on my computer skills. I ministered in the Baltimore Archives, inputting data into the North American Database. Another wonderful group of our Sisters had been steadily going through boxes, documenting papers full of historical events reaching back to the beginning of Blessed Theresa and Mother Caroline's mission in Baltimore.

I have been graced by God over the 50 years that I have been a School Sister of Notre Dame. When I first met the School Sisters at St.

Michael's Business School on Wolfe and Lombard Streets in Baltimore City, my life changed. I knew I had found a home and Sisters who I loved to share company with.

Back in my early days there were no pre-schools or kindergartens. When my mother would help my brother, who was a year ahead of me, with school I learned my colors and alphabet but words and numbers were a challenge for me.

Sister Mary James Brian Schammel, SSND - 50 Year (Cont'd)

When I started school I was labeled “slow” and each year became more of a struggle. In just one week at St. Michael’s with smaller class and real educators, however, the Sisters discovered that I was not slow, I just saw things differently. It turned out that I had a learning disorder, dyslexia. The Sisters suggested to my parents that I go to Villa Regina their Aspiranture located on the corner of Charles Street and Bellona Avenue where their Motherhouse was located. It was a perfect fit for me. I learned to enjoy reading.

SSND has provided me with so many graced opportunities beyond my wildest dreams. With the sisters, my weaknesses became my strengths. Teaching children with learning difficulties, I showed them they didn’t have to be ashamed. They could learn to look outside the norm to see things differently and enjoy learning. We had fun. Working with the women at the Caroline Center, I felt I was able to help them realize they didn’t have to carry the guilt of abuse all their lives. They could achieve their dreams by getting help and supporting each other.

The best thing about being a School Sister of Notre Dame has been the enormous gifts I have been given including going to the College of Notre Dame (now Notre Dame of Maryland University), being able to teach children for 30 years, working at Caroline Center in Baltimore City and now serving in the Baltimore Archives. But by far the greatest joy of my life has been living with my Sisters who are dedicated and committed women to our call: Love Gives Everything.