

Sister Marie de Sales O'Dowd, SSND – 60 Year Jubilee!



*"I am sincerely grateful
for God's chosen path."*

From my first day at Ascension School in Manhattan, I was impressed by the joy and kindness of my first-grade teacher, Sister Thomas Marie, S.C. Perhaps my religious vocation was planted then. As years passed, I met many religious women, and the desire never left me.

I met the School Sisters of Notre Dame when our family moved to Fort Lee, NJ where I attended Madonna School.

Assisting the Sisters with after-school chores was my day's highlight. My choice would have been the Academy of the Holy Angels, but my parents chose a Byzantine Rite Boarding Academy. The school was not an aspiranture: daily Mass, devotional prayers, chores, and academic studies filled my days. It was a fertile ground for a religious vocation.

Due to strong parental objections, entering the convent after graduation was not an option. Becoming a registered nurse was always my professional goal as I started Holy Name Hospital School of Nursing in Teaneck, NJ. Both the hospital chaplain and my spiritual director supported my decision to enter when I turned eighteen and no longer needed parental permission.



The next hurdle was which community. At Holy Name I observed that religious nurses eventually became nursing supervisors and hospital administrators, not bedside nurses. As much as I loved SSND, being a classroom teacher had no appeal for me. *Cont'd...*

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Sr. Marie with Mother Georgianne

In conversations with the SSNDs at Madonna, I realized that in the Wilton Province there would be a need for nursing the elderly and infirm sisters. At my entrance interview, I was told that completing my nursing education after profession could be a reality. It was then that SSND became a Spirit-inspired decision!

After my profession, I returned to Holy Name.

Upon graduation, my first community ministry was caring for the Sisters in our very small Infirmary while Lourdes Health Care Center was being built. These were the happiest years because I was imbibed with the spirit of SSND and grew to love both my vocation and profession.

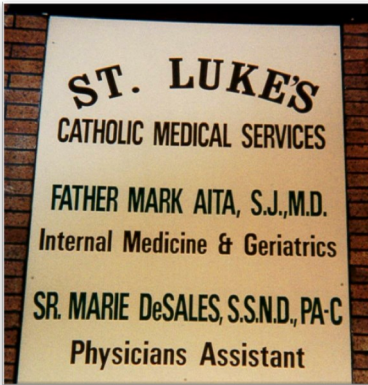
The vision of our Provincial Leaders strongly encouraged me to develop my skills, and I eventually transferred to Philadelphia to further my education as a physician assistant at Hahnemann (now Drexel) University.

During my educational pursuits and various ministry locations, I lived with many religious communities. Each living situation made me more appreciative of SSND internationality and our broad vision. I may have come to SSND somewhat hesitantly, now I am sincerely grateful for God's chosen path.

In 1980, our Charism invited me to minister in poverty-stricken Camden, NJ, as the Administrator of St. John the Baptist Prenatal Clinic. Because this was an administrative position I promised only two years but served three to complete my vision of the clinic. This position meant serving poor women in their education and preparation for motherhood. I still have a friendship with a family that had triplets and whose mother we trained to be a medical assistant and future employee at my next Camden ministry.

Then a newly ordained Jesuit invited me to join the Jesuits in the formation of the **Jesuit Urbane Service Team**. JUST, as we called, it comprised a physician, a lawyer, and sociologist who aimed to improve the life of Holy Name Parish and the citizens of North Camden. *Cont'd...*

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A benefit of being a PA is that you can minister in many subspecialties. It was the Spirit that drew me to Oncology/Hematology in Rockville/Bethesda, MD.

The physicians, staff, and patients welcomed a Religious presence. Here my most memorable encounter occurred. My patient was an NIH research scientist physician with a brain tumor.

Because he was a devout Jewish person, I asked him how his faith was helping him as his terminal illness progressed. He was thrilled with the question and asked me to be a group participant with his Rabbi as the discussion leader. I came to the first meeting not knowing that I was featured speaker! For several months, we shared how the Jewish and Christian faiths approached death and dying. As a mitzvah, the physician and his wife gave me a scholarship to Mercy Center, Burlington, CA to learn Spiritual Direction. It was a mutually enriching experience, and my friendship continues with his family.

Never did I dream that my 60 years would be so richly blessed with joy, ministry, and spiritual growth. With Mary I can sing "Magnificat!"