

## *My Vocation Story*



The motto of the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul the Apostle is to go where there is a need. The Sisters are involved in education, Parish Work, prison Chaplaincy, Counselling and Care of the sick and elderly. This has taken Sisters to a variety of ministries at home and abroad.

For myself in recent years I've found that this motto has changed my life.

Growing up on a dairy farm in the south of Ireland, God and prayer played a very important part in our family life. My mother's response to any difficulty or tragedy was: 'Welcome be the will of God'. This attitude to life gave me a great sense of belonging, not an intellectual sense of belonging but a felt sense of closeness to a



God who did and still does care about us as a family. I attended the local Primary school and then moved on and received my Secondary education in Scoil Pol, Kilfinane, this school was run by the Sisters of Charity of St Paul. When I finished school and decided to enter the convent my main concern was leaving home having had two sisters who had already gone into the Convent and were in England. I was nervous telling my Mum that I was considering entering Religious Life, I need not have worried. Her response was 'if that is what will make you happy' no word of concern for herself and those at home, this somehow gave me a great sense of freedom. Within a few months of going to England one of my sisters was sent back to Ireland to attend College and forty years on continues to work in Ireland. *The Lord's ways are wonderful indeed.*

I spent many very happy years of my religious life working in schools throughout the Midlands and a couple of years in South Africa. Due to a health problem I was considering retiring from the Teaching Profession, when out of the blue I had a call



from another Sister asking if I would be interested in doing some Prison work. The thought had never crossed my mind! I could not imagine myself coping with so many locks, keys and chains! Again those three little word came rushing to mind and I slowly became aware of my mum's phrase – Welcome be the will of God. Surely that does not apply to me working in a prison I thought?

I went to visit the prison and to my amazement felt very at ease among the women, one of them said to me “Who are you and what are you doing here?” I told her and she replied with, “Go for it, you'd be very good.” Having received approval I went away and gave it some serious thought and eventually applied for the position of Chaplain. My new place of work is with 315 women prisoners in the heart of the Staffordshire countryside; I've been there three years now and have never looked back. I also work in Male establishment which I really enjoy and have had nothing but respect and gratitude from the men there over a thousand of them.

What does it involve?

Picture the scene: a young mother finds herself in prison, being ‘sent down’ for five years. She has lost her freedom but what worries her most is her children. Who will look after them? Will they get to school? What happens when they fall sick?

These are the worries that we, the team of chaplains at Drake Hall hear frequently. Being locked up and becoming part of a prison regime can be a very dehumanising experience. A woman who is listened to and supported can come to a new self-awareness, begin to take responsibility for her actions and get a fresh sense of hope. As chaplain, I go round the prison and meet the women where they are: I visit the various work places have a brief chat or a cheery hello with the women as they do their daily work, I also meet with them at more sensitive times when they are in the Segregation Unit; I may be called on in times of crisis such as at the time of



bereavement; I also run a weekly relaxation class, a Rosary Group and an opportunity for the women to attend a 'shared prayer session. For those women who wish to know more about the Catholic faith I do a short course called Catholicism Made Simple. The weekly Mass provides the opportunity to spend time together, deepen our relationship with the Lord and have a chat over a coffee and biscuit. Many of the men and women find great comfort in coming to Church. Many a time I leave the prison and think, 'but for the grace of God go I'. We do have a number of Volunteers coming in to work with the prisoners these activities include, bible study, knitting/sewing(with the women), helping with music for Mass and often lending a listening ear.



Over the years I think I can sum up my experience of God in three little words 'You are mine'. Living in relationship with God does not mean living without pain and hardship. It means that every pain gives a new insight into the mystery of life and new reason to live.

These three little words have helped me, especially, live through pain, suffering, and uncertainty.

Today I see a great need for committed Religious Women working in our world. The way we serve people may vary as it did in my life. I worked in Education for many years and now I work in a privileged position as a Prison Chaplain. Prayer and community living are the foundation on which our lives are built. If you yourself or you know of anybody who might be interested in sharing this way of life we do run a number of Come and See weekend throughout the year in our Mother house in Birmingham and in houses in the various countries in which we live and work.

The vineyard of the Lord needs many committed and active followers of Christ.

*Sr. Patricia Murphy*

