

## THE JOURNEY OF SR. KATHLEEN DONNELLY, OP

My mother, Kathleen O'Hare was born in Bay City, Michigan. She went on to study nursing at St. Vincent Hospital in Toledo, Ohio. It was there that my mother met Charles Henry Donnelly, a pro baseball player for Toledo's baseball team. At the time they met, he was a patient at St. Vincent Hospital, having sustained an injury while playing baseball. It was there that they fell in love and eloped to get married.

Charles was sent to West Palm Beach, Florida, to find a winter camp for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Kathleen (my mother) followed him to West Palm Beach. Two sons were born to Kathleen and Charles but both died. On October 7, 1921, I, Kathleen, was the gift of that love. I was the first child to survive. My sister, Pat, was born in 1927 and Betty Jane was born in 1931. However, two sons were born in between—one of which I remembered as being in my mother's arms when I went to school at St. Anne's. I was about six. When I came home, my baby brother was no longer there, having died sometime during the day.

I attended St. Anne's School in West Palm Beach, as it was the only Catholic school. My love for reading was instilled in me by Sr. Evangeline Marie, my first grade teacher. There were 90 children in my classroom and, on a rainy day, Sister Evangeline Marie would tell the many students to read a book while she did some work for her class. They were told to sit up straight, but then Sister Evangeline was busy with her work, I found a comfortable position at my desk as I curled up and read my book. I always loved reading after that.

My Mother formed the first Catholic Girl Scout troop in Florida and I was a member of that troop. I went to Girl Scout Camp during the summer and, it was there that I met some future Adrian Dominicans. The Girl Scouts met once a week after school and had to earn badges. This was no easy task, as my mother never okayed a badge for me on the first try. She said this was because "I love you and I am your mother". I was awarded the Golden Eaglet pin in Girl Scouts many years later.

I loved swimming and was a potential Olympian and began training for the Olympics but tired of this because of having to rise so early. I gave up swimming for tennis and became the city tennis champion. I also played baseball and

softball. A lot of my life centered on sports and still does as I cheer on the Miami Dolphins. I even have a Dolphin jacket. I also am a faithful follower of the Miami Heat.

Following eighth grade I entered St. Anne's High School, which I attended through my freshman year. During lunchtime most of the students would go to the park behind St. Anne's and I would slip in the chapel to pray the rosary. I took after my Mother who had a great devotion to the rosary. I also have great belief in my guardian angel, who I believe led me to the church. I continue to have a great devotion to the rosary and a strong belief in the guidance of my guardian angel.

When I was fifteen I began to think about entering the convent and I focused on a religious order whose mission and focus centered on teaching and found this in the Adrian Dominicans. In 1937 Mother Gerald was visiting Miami and I rode the train up to Michigan with her and entered the congregation. During the trip we spent one night in Jacksonville in an orphanage run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. I was sixteen years old. We were met at the train station by a gentleman. When we arrived at the Motherhouse I was told by Mother Gerald to hide on the floor as she had not told anyone I was coming. Many sisters and postulants and novices were waiting outside for her when she arrived. After they departed I was told to get out of the car. Mother Gerald had told no one that she was bringing a new postulant with her and wanted to surprise the sisters, especially Sr. Mary Phillip.

Upon reception of the habit I was given the name of Sister Charles Mary by Mother Gerald.

During my time in formation I did not finish my high school education and, later on, Sr. Bertha gave me credits so that I could graduate from high school. Formation was a difficult time but I made it through and in 1937 I made profession and was sent on my first teaching assignment to St. Matthew's in Chicago. At this time I was working on college credits though attendance of classes on evenings and summers.

My next mission was St. Dominic's in Detroit where I taught for only one year. The doctor highly recommended that I be sent to a warmer climate and, so, I happily returned to Florida and I was assigned to St. Pat's in Miami Beach where

Msgr. Barry was pastor. I taught seventh grade. I loved St. Pat's. One day I came in from playground duty and heard Mother Gerald and Sr. Aurelia, who was the superior, talking and I knew it was about me and soon found out why.

My next assignment was as principal and superior at Sacred Heart in Pensacola. The school was brand new because the original school was in a deteriorating neighborhood. A home had been purchased to be used as a convent for the six sisters who would live and teach there. Not only was I to be the superior and principal but was to teach 70 seventh and eighth graders.

Following my time at Sacred Heart in 1961 I was sent to Little Flower in Hollywood as a teacher and taught eighth grade to an all boys group. I loved it there and thoroughly enjoyed teaching all boys. I primarily taught language arts.

In 1966 I was missioned to Holy Family in St. Petersburg and taught everything but new math. I did not know the terminology and new math was just not my thing.

In 1967 I was sent to Our Lady Queen of Martyr's in Ft. Lauderdale to be the principal. I remained there for the next seven years.

In 1974 the pastor of St. Hugh's, who had been taught by Adrian Dominicans and attributed his vocation to Adrians, requested Adrian Dominicans when the congregation who had taught there left. I was invited to be the principal and remained as such for 34 years. It was a primarily Hispanic parish but most spoke English. They were a warm, loving and concerned group of people and I loved my time there.

In 2008 I was honored with the reception of the Papal Cross. I also received, in 2009, the Lumen Christi Award, which is presented each year by the Catholic Educators' Guild of the Archdiocese of Miami. I was also nominated for Outstanding Principal by the National Catholic Education Association. I received a letter from the officials of the NCEA telling me that I would be the third in a row from the Archdiocese of Miami and they did not feel it fair to award three in a row from Miami. They congratulated me on my nomination.

I initiated a Civil Day at St. Hugh's celebrating 1776 as the birth of our nation. The children had to dress in costumes of 1776, which helped the students identify with their ancestors. I wanted this to be a great learning experience so the students had to research their ancestry and give a two-minute presentation regarding this. We held a parade led by a bagpiper and both a Papal and an American flag. This was not only exciting for the children but was soul-searching for their parents and grandparents. It was marvelous to see a parade of the "children of the world". The parents of the Cuban children presented me with a plaque thanking me for reminding them of their roots and memories. What began as a fun project took on far greater meaning.

High schools in the area sought after graduates of St. Hugh's because of the educational foundation that they received at St. Hugh's as well as their sports achievements. St. Hugh's had a great sports program, I believe, because of my own love for sports, which spurred me on in allowing development of the program.

At one point I was out walking on the parish grounds and saw what appeared to be a pile of sheets. When I went to move them a sailor from the VA Hospital jumped from under them and ran and jumped over the gate. We called 911 and, after the third call, the police finally arrived. The man, who had mental issues, had run to the prayer garden on the parish campus and hugged the statue of Mary. I received a call from the Chief of Police apologizing for not coming sooner.

I also initiated the building of a small prayer room in the school. Students from different grades would participate in the celebration of the Mass there each day. The Mass was planned by the students of the grade level it was to attend on that particular day.

During my 34 years there the academic achievements and growth were remarkable. Standardized tests for each year showed growth for every grade level from two to four grade equivalencies above expectations. Consistently the students scored above diocesan, provincial and national levels. When I arrived the school was a simple cement block and steel structure devoid of any amenities and facilities and grew to a modern, multi-centered complex that still serves the school and the parish community. Providing the children and parents a safe, comfortable environment in which to learn and play has been a landmark in my

career. My role in the development has gratified me the most in my 42 years as principal.

Much was accomplished during my years at St. Hugh's especially as I followed up on what happened to graduates who became real leaders in their professions and in the community. These have all been a source of joy to me, but my greatest satisfaction comes from witnessing the spiritual growth and depth of character evinced by their charitable acts and community spirit.

In 2009 I retired because of a fall and surgery and came to Adrian for recuperation. I was able to go back down to Florida following recovery from a broken hip. During these two years spent at St. Pat's in Miami Beach I substitute taught. I also conducted interviews with young parishioners about to be married.

In 2011 I came to Adrian because of health issues. I was not happy to be leaving my state of birth but it was necessary to do so. I have been in Adrian now for four years

In 2015 St. Hugh's had a Mass in my honor. The pastor purchased a ticket for me for this special occasion. Because of the timing I was able to attend my nephew, Mark's, final profession. In attendance at the Mass were former students who are now parents and grandparents who have passed down their love for St. Hughes to the next generation. The short time I spent in Florida was wonderful.

As I write this I am nearing the sunset of my life and I am envisioning the scene that will take place when I pass to the next life. In it I am climbing toward the light of the sun and I am greeted and embraced by my mother. My father is next to her and says, "Hey, Chum, (his nickname for me which only one other person knows about) what took you so long"?

At this time of my life I am grateful for all that has been—my family, my community, my friends. I know that in the days ahead God will bless me in the same manner as he has always done and for this I, too, am grateful.

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