



A Woman of Providence...

...believes all things are possible.

A persistent call and the draw of many and varied works drew this SP to religious life

If there is any one Sister in the entire Sisters of Providence Community best known for her hearty laughter and general deportment of merriment, it is Sister Mary Martin de Porres. While, for some, the Mary Martin of her name conjures up a well-known theatrical performer, her name in religion actually honors Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Saint Martin de Porres, a saint known for his love of the poor.

Known affectionately as “Marty,” she grew up on a New England farm where she knew the love of devoted, hard-working, faith-centered parents and close-knit siblings. No one’s life is idyllic and



***Mary Martin de Porres
Grisé, SP***

her’s was no exception. She suffered many losses including the untimely death of her sister, Theresa, just three months after another sister, Rose, entered the convent. Six months later her mother died at 52 of a stroke.

For a period of time, Marty (then Constance Gris ) would not allow herself to consider life as a Catholic Sister. She recalls wanting “to be normal, have fun, and do fun things,” so “put the idea (of a religious vocation) out of my head as much as I could.”

Considering different options

Following high school and two years of post graduate study at a business school, Marty decided to move some 40 or so miles away from her rural hometown of North Brookfield, Massachusetts to the City of Springfield. “I decided I’d get away from

everyone who knew me and thought I should be a Sister,” she recalls. Needing a place to live, she chose the SP-sponsored Saint Luke’s Home, then a residence for young working women. “Within a week,” she remembers with good-natured resignation, “someone felt compelled to say to me, ‘You have a religious vocation.’”

continues...

“By that time,” said Sister Marty of her protracted denial and avoidance, “I was pretty convinced that this was what God wanted of me so I decided why not just run with it?”

Then came the question of which Congregation to join? She received her education from a teaching order of Sisters she greatly admired but did not see herself as a teacher. She considered life as a missionary, but concluded she was “too chicken. I didn’t like bugs or alligators,” she explains in her usual candor.

Being drawn to ministry

In the end she was drawn to the SPs because of their ministries. “I didn’t like the habit the Sisters were wearing then but I did like their work, particularly in the hospitals and medical field.” Their care of children held a strong pull for her, too. Remembering her choice, Sister Marty said, “The Sisters of Providence had so many different kinds of work, I figured if I wasn’t good at one job they would put me somewhere else.”

Too, the SPs were the choice of her older sister, Rose. “I didn’t choose this Community because of my sister,” she acknowledges, “but I knew a little about life in this Community simply because she was here, and what I knew, I liked. Both of us left a big family to come into another big family,” she says of their decisions so many years ago to live out their religious vocations as Sisters of Providence.

According to Marty, the interpersonal relationship challenges religious face are the same challenges experienced in any family. “If you marry you learn to deal with all sorts of personalities – those in the family you grew up in

“Everyone has a vocation whether it’s to religious, married or single life. I don’t see any one vocation as possessing more value than the other two... Every vocation, no matter the state of life, is a call from God.”

—Sister Marty

and those in the family you enter,” she explained. “I don’t see much difference between the types of issues you face in either religious life or married life. Whatever your choice, you adjust to whatever happens,” she said.

“Everyone has a vocation whether it’s to religious, married or single life. I don’t see any one vocation as possessing more value than the other two. Just because someone is a religious,” she continued to explain, “does not make that person any better, or more special, than anyone else. Every vocation, no matter the state of life, is a call from God.”

Finding a place to grow

When asked what else besides ministry attracts women to the SPs, she answers: “A woman starting out in this Community today can be assured she will grow in holiness and in relationship with others. She will find a foundation here on which she can build and grow.”

Speaking of that foundation, Marty noted that the SPs have always been women of vision. “The Sisters of Providence began ministering in the greater Holyoke-Springfield area some 142 years ago. Sometimes there have been a few of us, sometimes hundreds of us. No matter our number, though, each of us does what we can to extend our mission, and then leaves the rest to God.”