

## **Sr Pat Pearson**

### **A Postulancy with a difference.**

I have a lot of memories and stories of my life within this much loved DMJ family. I will write about one of my first memories, as a postulant in Middlesbrough community.

To the best of my knowledge I have managed to be 'first' three times in my life. I am the first born of my parents, the first postulant of the Middlesbrough DMJ community and the first DMJ to use squatters' right.

It is to the second of these that I want to share- my experience as a Postulant in Middlesbrough.

Being a first postulant in a very active totally committed small group of women was wonderful but would it work? I gather a lot of discussion and phone conversations went up and down the country between the Provincial house and the North. Initially it was thought I would go south for a Postulancy programme but that would have meant beginning in 1976 because the nature of my work meant a 6 month notice to resign and it was thought better that I begin as soon as possible. The plan was that I would continue my work and would live in community four nights a week.

I was a bit anxious when I heard the word 'programme' and surely I had no clue as to what a postulant was so I was relieved when Sr Leonard said 'Don't worry, Pat. It's a long time since we had one and things have changed!!'

Mary Kevin was brought out of retirement to be postulant mistress and tried her very best to get her head around the fact that I was to stay in the house only 4 nights a week and that I didn't have a short skirt in my wardrobe.

We managed to fit all into our busy lives. Everyone was kind and helpful and it helped that I was working with Phil Lafferty, often sharing long hours on the road together and working in the whole diocese on various social tasks. Mary Kevin was always encouraging that all would be well, encouraging me when I wasn't too sure.

And so it was until mid Oct 1975 when Phil and myself were called to remove from an adoption placement a baby girl of a year old. Sadly this was her second breakdown in adoption placement and as her key worker I was her main carer. The diocese had to abide by the rules. My first reaction spoken aloud to Phil was just 'maybe I ought to give this postulancy thing up and go back to the small community. Maybe it's a sign.' I was confused. I went off with baby Marcella for her to have a medical and Phil set off for home. On my way to the office with the baby Phil stopped me and said the community were willing to accept the baby if I wished to continue.

So began another stage of my DMJ Postulancy programme! I gathered that Mary Kevin was the go-between and had persuaded Marie Paula that the Spirit would find away. I do know that by the time all the official paper work at the office was complete Marcella was another '4 day a weeker' in Middlesbrough community.

Marcella crept into all our hearts and my introduction to the office book, church history community life, revolved around feeding, bath-time, playtime and bedtime. The sisters did a tremendous amount to help support the two of us.

Mary Kevin was determined to keep her distance from Marcella but Marcella made sure she was not ignored. Marcella often would crawl to Mary Kevin's door and wait noisily until Kevin appeared. Or we would often find both of them in chapel, Kevin having turned the stool upside down and placing the baby inside. Mary Kevin would be praying away and Marcella content just to be.

The Sisters in the community did all they could to provide a warm loving environment for Marcella who thrived on it all.

In mid Nov a third family was chosen for the baby. Because of the previous breakdown we decided that more visits would be needed. Again the community stepped in if the appointments were on the days we were in the community.

Mary Kevin was very concerned that I was too attached to the baby and was unsure that I wouldn't be able to let her go and shared her concern with me. I was extremely attached to her but not to the extent that I would not be able to let her go to two loving Parents. We were all attached at this stage, and my sisters really went the extra mile, so many times during those months. They never once made me feel that their space was being invaded. Early Jan saw Marcella placed into a warm loving family in Leeds .They collected her from the community and she went off with them saying bye to all of us happily.

It was a very quiet house for a while but dear Mary Kevin announced to all who were around that initially she was afraid I wouldn't be able to leave all and follow Him but had no doubts now after handing over Marcella.

This was the background from which I started in this family. A willingness to be different, to make space and an honesty that sometimes cost. To stretch the walls of our tent and be able to be instruments of mercy and compassion.

I left Darlington station on Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> 1976 to begin my novitiate strengthened by the treasure I found in each sister of Middlesbrough community. I think they deserved medals for putting up with me but they certainly passed their postulancy badge.

Pat Pearson

