

2012 Jubilee



First Profession
July 31, 1962

JUBILEE WISDOM

In one sense my life has been very easy and very blessed. I've never had to ponder or wrestle with my vocation.

I tell everyone I was a nun from birth!

**-Marie Vianney
Bilgrien, SSND**

Marie Vianney Bilgrien, SSND

50 Years

Sister Marie Vianney describes her ministries in the text, below.

When I was growing up, my hometown,

Marshfield, Wisconsin was a very closed society. People of color could not stay overnight. I taught for several years in Wisconsin elementary schools in Milwaukee, Horicon, Chippewa Falls and Superior and then had an opportunity to teach at an all Black school in Mississippi. It was a life changing experience to learn and love another culture. From there, I went to Bolivia and worked as a catechist in an Amarya village, living at 14,000 feet. Again, I expanded my soul. Later, I ran an orphanage in Guatemala. It was a wonderful experience, but one day, as I was cleaning tables and waiting for the children to come from school, I realized that I didn't want to be mother but sister. I went to Catholic Theological Union and earned a master's degree in theological studies. The best thing was that the theology I was taught matched my experiences in all those earlier places. Later, I was sent to Rome and received a degree in sacred theology from the Angelicum. I came home and worked in Hispanic ministry in several places and taught at two diocesan institutes. Teaching is my gift from God. I bring people to God and God to people. I most experience God when I am teaching. God has truly blessed me and so has SSND.

I say that everything I know, I learned while teaching fifth grade.

I'll describe two learnings from my fifth grade students in Mississippi.

In 1976, Caroline said, "Sister, you should get your ears pierced." I told her "No – that I'm afraid it will hurt." She said it to me a second time and I said no, again. The third time she said, "Sister, you should have your ears pierced because God's women are beautiful." I thought this was a great theological statement. I went back to Milwaukee in summer for tertianship and at the end of the program, I had my ears pierced. I was happy to be a woman and an SSND. When I went back to Mississippi, Caroline saw my earrings – they were tiny ones – and she said, "Oh no sister, that won't do, you have to flaunt it." So I do have some bigger earrings. She deepened my understanding of womanhood and sisterhood in Christ.

The second example: One day I was upset about something that really was my fault. Instead of dealing with it, I started scolding my fifth graders and went on and on. Suddenly, little Hughye stood up and said, "Sister, you said the same thing, three different ways and we heard you, and that's enough." I looked at him and started to laugh and everyone laughed and it was over. A few days later, I said, "Hughye, where did you ever get the courage to say that?" He said, "Sister, we really love you and I knew that if you kept going on and on, we wouldn't love you anymore." I thanked him. This taught me wisdom comes from anyone, anywhere and I need to listen. I thank God often that he made me laugh instead of having a fit!



**School Sisters
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