

Sister Kathleen Gardner

My Vocation Call



The foundation of my vocation came from a loving family. As a family we would say the Rosary together. My mother would read us children's Bible stories at bedtime; she taught us to pray and encouraged us to take an active part in the Parish.

The first seed of a Religious vocation was probably planted when I was 5 or 6yrs old. Very occasionally my mother would receive a letter' along with a few photos, from a friend in Africa. I remember sitting at the breakfast table before running off to school, being shown a photograph of a Sister dressed in a white habit and tropical hat with several little African children around her. My mother would then tell us about her training days as a nurse and about this friend of hers who entered a Missionary Order.

At the age of 10 we were all asked to write what we would *like* to do when we were adults. I remember vividly, being asked by the smiling teacher what I meant by "Midmaid", it seemed common sense to my child's mind that a Midwife was someone who delivered babies but was married whereas a Midmaid was an unmarried baby deliverer! A sense of vocation was beginning to form and it was to Africa I wanted to go. I felt convinced this would happen although how I did not know. I was content with the thought.

My teenage years were a terrible struggle. No way did I want to enter the Convent; I longed to get married and have children. I hid any thought of becoming a Sister and started dating boys and behaving like any other teenager of my time. However a constant nag was present which I was unable to ignore so I thought it best to take one step at a time. I would go to London and do my nursing training. As I was very attached to my home and family this would give me time to separate gradually - and perhaps I would get rid of the nag within!

I did my nursing training at St. John and Elizabeth's, a hospital run by the Mercy Sisters. I had a long term boyfriend but deep within knew I would be very unhappy if I married because this was not my vocation. In my third year of training I realized I would have to respond to the call although I was reluctant. Who would I enter with? I only knew two Orders of Sisters and neither appealed to me.

One day during my last year of training I was flicking through a paper. There on one of the pages was a picture of a nun driving a tractor. My heart leapt. I thought that nuns were "stuffy" but this one looked more normal, she was actually driving a tractor! I didn't look for anything else, took the telephone number and made an appointment to "go and see".

Arriving at Ladywell I was taken to the Chapel Parlour. A tall Sister arrived saying that the Novice Mistress was out but she the Superior of the house would answer any questions and would show me round. During the course of the conversation something "twigged" in the back of my mind that this must be the Order of Sisters that my mother's friend had entered. I said to the Superior, "My mother, I think has a friend in this Order but she is in Africa - her name is Ignatius." "That's me" Ignatius replied, "I've been home three, years now!"

I felt that the Lord had given me a very clear sign and so I sat the nursing exams - and entered without delay. Not having any idea about the Charisms of the various Orders I found I was a Franciscan through and through and I thank God for the wonderful gift of my vocation. Not only did he give me the gift of a vocation but He fulfilled all my childhood dreams. I was sent to Africa and I became a "Midmaid!"