

## Sr Patricia Harrison



I have been a Daughter of Charity for 51 years. It seems like yesterday that I set out from my home in the middle of the North Yorkshire Moors to begin my training as sister in St Vincent's school for the Blind and Deaf in Glasgow.

As a child I felt God was very close to me so when a missionary priest came to our village when I was 9 I realised that I too wanted to serve others. I met the Daughters of Charity when I went to secondary school and was attracted to their life of prayer lived in community. They were a caring and happy group of women. Sometimes I would go with one of them to visit the elderly and I often saw them give food to the homeless men who turned up at their doorstep. I was always struck by the respect and affection of the sisters on these occasions.

When I was 17, I was up on the moors one day and I felt full of gratitude for the lovely place I lived in and for my happy family life. It was almost as though God said to me "Now that I have given you all this, will you do something for me? Will you go and give my love to those in the cities who are not so lucky?" I said "Yes" and at 18 I went off to become a sister, determined to give it a try. My father told me that if it did not work out there would always be a place for me at home and that gave me the courage to go ahead.

It did work out and my life has been a very full and happy one with far more challenges and surprises than I could ever have imagined. I spent a lot of it in secondary schools teaching English and RE. In the late 70's I moved to our school for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Liverpool. I loved teaching those children who had so many odds stacked against them. We taught in small groups and this meant that there was a lot of personal interaction between the children and the teacher. It was a challenging and exciting time.

In 1991, I was asked to go to Ethiopia to help train women who wanted to become sisters. This too was challenging as the culture was so different. I was faced with dire poverty. The simple dignity and generosity of the Ethiopians in sharing the little that they had with all in need made me question so many of our Western values. I came back to Darlington where I am now part of a parish team helping to organise groups and visiting the lonely, the bereaved and the housebound elderly people.

All through my life, I've felt a great love for St Louise de Marillac our Foundress. She had so many problems to face but that did not stop her from having a place in her heart for the neediest. I too feel challenged to that special caring for those who are sad, lonely or deprived. Truly "the love of Christ leaves us no option" and I am so happy to belong to a community for whom that is a reality.