

# 175 SISTER PROFILES: Sisters Glenna Connors and Sally McLaughlin

## **Bringing Hope Spring 2001**

Long after our interview with Sisters Sally McLaughlin and Glenna Connors their words continue to resonate. Both bring passion, love and joy to their work and it was evidenced throughout our conversation about their ministry at St. Peter Parish.



**Sister Glenna Connors**



**Sister Sally McLaughlin**

St. Peter Parish is located in the inner city of Dorchester, MA, a multi-cultural neighborhood and one of the poorest communities in Boston.

Dorchester has always been an immigrant community. Many years ago Irish and Italian



CELEBRATING

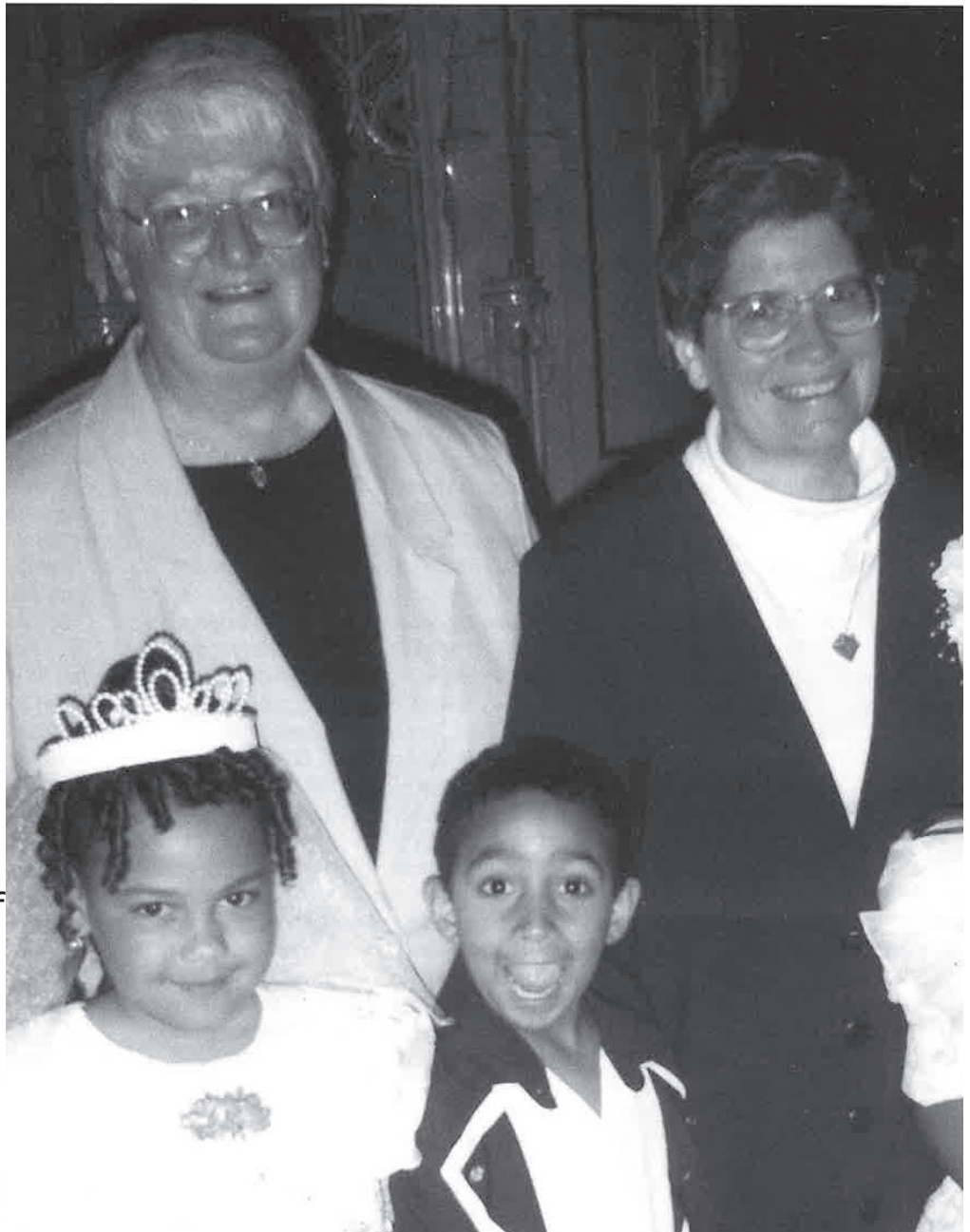
# 175

YEARS OF JOYFUL WITNESS

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immigrants came to Dorchester looking for a better life. Today, Dorchester is home to Cape Verdeans, Haitians, Vietnamese, Latinos, West Indians and many others. S. Sally notes that they are hardworking people who are struggling to help their children succeed. S. Glenna adds that the Church was the centre of their lives in their home countries and continues to be here. While it is a very different reality here as well as a very different culture, both Sisters Sally and Glenna are committed to help them succeed.

S. Sally McLaughlin has served as a pastoral associate at St. Peter



**Sisters Glenna and Sally  
Children making their first Communion  
St. Peter's Parish, Dorchester, MA**

for 10 years, and S. Glenna for five.

The Sisters of Charity have been at St. Peter School for over a century. Together with Sister Maureen Forde, who is a teacher at St. Peter School,

and Sister Maureen Beale, who plays the organ every Sunday, there is a presence of four Sisters of Charity.

In describing the multi-faceted nature of their work, they first describe the parish—particularly the parents and children. S. Glenna notes that parents in the parish have great concerns about the safety of their children given the high crime rate in Dorchester.

Because of declining enrollment, St. Peter Catholic School was in real danger of closing a year ago. Reaching out to families who worshiped at St. Peter and participated in the religious education program, Sisters Sally and Glenna recruited 50 neighborhood children for the school. The pastor, Father Doyle, sought additional scholarships for these families. Parents wept with joy to have this opportunity for their children.

To help prepare the children academically for St. Peter School, Sisters Glenna and Sally spent the summer conducting an informal tutoring program.

In another aspect of their ministry, St. Peter Parish is an active member of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO). The GBIO brings people of different faiths to work together for social and economic justice. Some of the issues the GBIO is tackling include affordable housing and public education. For example, the Interfaith Organization has just raised over \$5 million in no-interest five-year loans to set up a revolving fund to build 1000 two-family “Nehemiah” homes for working families in Greater Boston. Now they will be organizing to obtain contributions of land or construction subsidies from the state and municipalities. They have also

recently lobbied the City of Boston to set aside funds for instructional supplies for Boston Public School students. Altogether, the city subsequently allocated \$2 million in new funds.

Perhaps the most important outgrowth of work with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization is the empowerment of people within the parish. "Meeting individually with one another and at house meetings help people to build relationships and share values and concerns," says S. Glenna. "They learn to collaborate, to speak publicly, to articulate the problem, to be heard and to make a difference. Working with people of different faiths, races and neighborhoods, parishioners have addressed and influenced public officials at meetings of 4000 people.

What makes this particularly notable is that English is a second language

for most of these people." S. Glenna notes that the mission of the Interfaith Organization is to enable ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

**Through their coaching, Sisters Sally and Glenna play a role in helping to develop leaders in their parish and neighborhood. For both, their work within the parish is an outgrowth of their background in education.**

Both were educators for many years including teaching grammar school and high school, as well as serving as principals. S. Glenna was first introduced to the Sisters of Charity at St. Patrick Grammar School in Lawrence, MA, and S. Sally at St. Kevin School in Dorchester.

S. Glenna continued her education at St. Patrick High School in Lawrence and S. Sally at Msgr. Ryan Memorial

High School (MRM) in Dorchester. Both graduated from Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, NS, and then pursued graduate work at Boston College, earning Masters in Religious Education.

In asking how the Sisters came to be Sisters of Charity themselves, S. Glenna said that she felt called to be a Sister of Charity during a freshman retreat in high school. She remembers her heart burning within her as she received the Eucharist each morning.

**She said, “The example of the Sisters, their joy and their presence, encouraged me to be a Sister.” Sister Sally said that many wonderful Sisters influenced her at St. Kevin’s and MRM. She remembers what she wrote at age 16 on her application to the Congregation: “So many people are mixed up**

**about how to find happiness. I want to help people to know they need God to find happiness.”**

Both Sisters speak passionately about how their work helps them to make a difference. Their work allows them to put faith into action for justice. Through their involvement with the Interfaith Organization, they have the opportunity to work for systemic change. This means asking difficult questions such as why people aren’t paid a living wage or can’t find affordable housing or a good education, notes S. Sally. Through their work, the Sisters are associated with a broad cross section of the community from the executive to the laborer.

The Sisters focus on helping people build the relationships which make things happen. As S. Sally mentions, it is through the relationships that communities have the ability to make a difference.

**She adds, “It would be easy to dismiss the problems within the Boston Public School System as too large, unwieldy and intractable, but to have this attitude is to dismiss 95% of our children. It is very clear to me that God is in this. This is an opportunity to make the world the way God wants it to be and the way God wants people to be. This work breaks down the barriers between neighbors and races and helps us to discover the presence of God in one another.”**

S. Glenna adds, “My great joy is to see people grow. It’s a tremendous education for us as well. As they have grown, we have grown. Sometimes, I am bone-tired going into a meeting, but I come out feeling I’ve experienced the breath of the Holy Spirit, because they are so exciting and so rewarding.

It is a bonding experience to sit down with people from all different backgrounds. You truly feel that the Kingdom is here and now.”

Within their pastoral ministry, the Sisters are trying to fashion a faith community that exists in relation to the world. As S. Glenna mentions, “The bonds are so strong it is like a family. We are lucky and blessed to be here, to work together, to share a vision with Father Doyle and our people.”

“Through the faith community,” S. Sally adds, “we can respond to the challenge to be a church for the world—to reveal God’s love in the world and to transform the world. This includes not only ministering to the needs of people within the parish, but also helping them to live the mission of Jesus in the world.”