

## CONNIE YUNYK'S TESTIMONIAL

Good afternoon cherished Sisters of all Religious Congregations and Orders and good afternoon everyone!

Bon après-midi chères Soeurs et chers Amis!

It is with immense pride that I share my thoughts and reflections about the SISTERS OF THE HOLY NAMES OF JESUS AND MARY and the influence and positive impact they have had on my life and on the life of many young women who have walked the halls of St. Mary's Academy.

Thanks to my forward-thinking Italian immigrant parents, who strongly believed in providing a foundational, Catholic education for their only daughter, I was introduced to the sisters at a very young age. "The SISTERS" have played a very significant role in my life since elementary school, first at St. Edward the Confessor on Arlington St., followed by St. Mary's Academy for my grade 7-12 education.

**As a young girl, I was introduced to many holy name educators; I now often ask myself what is it that continues to resonate with me as I journey with this committed community of educators and social justice advocates?**

Central to the mission of the SNJM is the full development of the human person created in God's image, through education, social justice and contemplation in action, with a particular concern for the poor and marginalized. What I have witnessed over the years, as a student, teacher or administrator is an unparalleled and ongoing commitment to this mission.

For instance

- dedication to a quality, rigorous pre-university academic program,
- support for student-led mission trips to Yakima Washington or El Salvador,
- providing access to our school through a bursary program to deserving and qualifying young women,
- educating the community (faculty, students, Associates) about our foundress BLESSED MARIE-ROSE DUROCHER and the journey of the SNJM in Canada and USA

These are but a few examples of how the Sisters have touched and continue to touch our lives.

As a young girl, the sisters were part of my everyday life; as teachers yes, but more importantly as spiritual mentors and women of faith as they led daily prayer in the classroom or through daily early morning Eucharistic celebrations in Chapel.

With time and with the retirement of many sisters from classroom teaching, the daily presence of sisters in the school has gradually decreased.

However, they remain very close and are tirelessly committed to our young women:

- as prayer pals,
- welcoming our choirs to RÉsidence Despins before Christmas,
- through their presence and participation at our school masses, student retreat programs, sporting events, school productions, and forming them as Young Associates.
- they are sources of information for the many SNJM corporate stands which our young women learn about and advocate for in the school and Winnipeg community.

The SNJM mission is rooted in the words of Jesus found in Luke's gospel: ***"I have come to cast fire on the earth, and wish it were already kindled."***

Blessed Marie Rose Durocher, a woman of faith, love, kindness, caring and courage along with her pioneering Sisters passionately fuelled a movement, one which is alive today through the many projects and ministries initiated and sponsored by the SNJM. The fire which fuelled and nurtured our Sisters has been lit in many of us over the years. My inspiration is anchored in the courage and vision you have modelled for us!

I am indeed both proud and privileged to have been touched by many of these holy women along the way. With all sincerity...what I have learned from this caring and compassionate community of women leaders and exceptional business women is as much a part of my DNA as the biological DNA passed along to me through my parents. Thank you!

Today we celebrate the influence of consecrated women in Manitoba. May God continue to bless you all with peace, good health and courage. Continue to pray for us as we navigate through today's challenges, obstacles and temptations!

Que Le Bon Dieu continue à vous bénir avec de la paix, de la bonne santé et du courage.

Merci! Thank you!