

Letter to myself: Jeannine Vermette, snjm

Dearest Jeannine,

My heartfelt congratulations on the wise choice you made when you were 17 years old! You decided to answer God's call to join a wonderful religious community that you had known since you are a child. It was during a weekend retreat that you heard that call, through the words of an excellent preacher, Bishop Raymond Roy. After that event, your whole life changed! However, given that you had played music since you were six years old, you continued in that line, making music right up until the present!

Born into a Catholic family, I myself was not very religious or pious! I was even discovered hanging out in a restaurant with my gang of friends instead of at mass one Sunday morning. I never enjoyed routine and so it was more fun to be there than in church, where I did not understand anything.

En route to the retreat, I stopped to visit my godmother, my grandmother Dorge, whom I dearly loved because she was so full of goodness. She encouraged me to listen carefully to what was said during that retreat. She convinced me that the retreat was a very important time in people's lives. I had just received a Sony transistor radio...a very popular gift in the 1960s...and I thought it would be really fun to use it in the large dormitory where all the girls attending the retreat would sleep! I had never slept in a dormitory and did not know that there would be supervision. That idea did not work and I was forced to learn about silence! I also decided to pay heed to my godmother and listen attentively to the sermons!

What I heard surprised me. It was a call to devote my life to the service of the Lord and His Church through the musical gifts that God had given me, and to continue to develop those gifts. The bishop extolled the wonders of living in a community and I had seen that joy in the community life of the sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, in St. Jean-Baptiste, for so many years. I had also seen my two aunts as two happy women within that community. They exhibited a joie de vivre that inspired me. One of them, Sister Agathe Dorge, was also a great musician, and I felt called to follow in her footsteps as a music teacher.

It was difficult to return home, as I had no idea how I was going to share what had hit me like a ton of bricks! I cried a great deal for several nights. I felt torn because I was very fond of a red-headed boy who was an excellent dancer. How could I tell him without hurting him, and how would I tell my family?

A sentence from the imitation of Jesus Christ that came to me often during that time was, "It is worth nothing for a person to have the whole world if he loses his soul." I finally slipped the beans while talking with my piano teacher, Sister Hélène Louisa, who immediately took me to see the abbess, Sister Arthur Marie, who received me with open arms and gave me guidance.

My parents thought that I was too young and that I should wait. One of my uncles told me that he would eat his shirt if I stayed at the convent longer than one month! My redheaded friend told me that he would wait for me....

I travelled by plane to do my postulancy and novitiate, spoiled child that I was! After living for two years in Montreal, I was delighted to return to Manitoba to share my gifts at St Mary's Academy, followed by Académie St-Joseph and the St. Gerard parish in the city's east end. It was during the Second Vatican Council, and the priest, Bishop Raymond Beaudry, got me out of my music studio so that I could direct the choir and congregation at Sunday mass... I am still doing it 40 years later! I became so passionate about working on musical liturgical programs that I did it in

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my hometown of St. Jean Baptiste, in the Catholic parish of Flin Flon, at Sacred Heart in Winnipeg, in the Precious Blood parish for 10 years, and at St. Boniface Cathedral for 22 years! At the same time, I gave music lessons in piano, guitar, accordion and organ, using my talents to the best of my ability. I also had the opportunity to hone my performance skills, especially in my bilingual community. For several years, I have been teaching young people ages 6 to 14 as the director of the Les Petits Intrépides choir.

After 50 years of religious life, what kind of retirement could I take? It continues to be filled with music, and prayer, of course. I take harp therapy lessons so that I can enhance the lives of the sick and the elderly in my community.

THANK YOU GOD for giving me this full life that I continue to enjoy today!