



## **Sister Sheila Smith IBVM: Canadian Witness to Faith**

I was born and raised in Toronto, the tenth of twelve children. On September 8, 1957, I entered the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and, in 1963, obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Toronto through St. Michael's College. In 1964, I obtained a High School Teaching Certificate in English and a Commercial Specialist Certificate from the Faculty of Education. I also completed post graduate courses in English from the University of Toronto.

For one year, I taught English/Typing at Loretto Academy, Hamilton, and for several years I taught at Loretto Secretarial Department before moving to Loretto College School to teach English/Typing. From 1981-1991, I served as General Secretary for the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in North America. As a result of my work in that office, I developed an interest in updating our personnel records and our history. This history eventually involved me in collaborating with our Institute Archivist on updating membership records, school records and the obituary accounts of our members.

I am currently serving on the Alumnae Executive Committee and the Loretto Abbey Catholic Secondary School Advisory Committee as the representative of the Loretto Sisters at Loretto Abbey.

**If you had to create a Catholic Résumé which highlighted ways you are a WITNESS to the Catholic faith, what would be on it?**

My desire to be a Witness to the Catholic Faith began in elementary school and continued through high school, it was fostered by the example of the Loretto Sisters and deepened during my years in high schools because of my closer interaction with the Sisters. I and many other students were impressed by their commitment to education and their commitment to Christ through their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Our logo for the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 2009 was: "Love the Driving Force."

I entered the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary from a business background and suddenly found myself in a classroom—a wonderful place to bear witness to the Catholic Faith. The

teaching of English especially lends itself to dealing with all the issues of life. Issues that neither the teacher nor the students can ignore. Issues that demand answers that test our faith.

Jesus, before beginning his Mission, gathered his disciples. With that in mind, I chose to witness to my Catholic Faith as a member of a Religious Community. The support of Community, or of a group, provides a purpose, a direction and opportunities to change the focus of one's witnessing as circumstances and needs change. It also provides encouragement and a discernment process to evaluate the results of that witnessing. Above all, it strengthened in me the belief that I could make a difference in the lives of others.

Witnessing requires courage as well as commitment. It is demanding and, for many, requires leaving the familiar and the comfortable for what is unknown. We do not choose those we witness with and so other gifts are required—the ability to work with others, the ability to compromise, the willingness to go the extra mile, the willingness to consider another possibility, the willingness to move on, if necessary. Prayer is a very important part of witnessing and referred to frequently in Scripture.

Witness implies enthusiastic testimony to what the Lord has done in each of our lives. Christian Witness is believers' testimony to what they know: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is life and hope for the entire world.

**What kind of difference do you hope to make in living a life based on Jesus' teachings?**

As a Christian, I seek to do the will of God, to follow in Christ's footsteps, and to honour and glorify God. I hope that my belief in and witness to the Resurrection of Christ gives hope and encouragement to others.

I hope that all whom I meet find encouragement from my struggle to lead a faith-filled and hope-filled life in service to all those lives I touch. May I never intentionally injure another by word or deed. May I never doubt God's enduring love for me. In remembering God's love for me, may I never betray another's friendship by envy, anger or pride.

I hope to transform my own life so that I may follow Jesus more closely and, therefore, be of greater service to others, especially in proclaiming the Word of God.

**What advice do you have for a young Catholic finding ways to express their faith?**

I would advise young Catholics to become involved in a group in the school, in the parish or an outside group that supports social justice issues. Fundraising through one's High School for those most in need in our world provides ample opportunities to witness to our Catholic faith by becoming involved with ongoing organizations striving to raise awareness of social injustice and inequality in our world that need to be challenged by all Christians.

