



Bishop Fenwick High School
in Middletown, Ohio.

WHAT WE BEGAN CONTINUES – Bishop Fenwick High School

By S. Mary Bodde

“I said I would do it for one year.”
Thirty-eight years later Associate Patrice Harty has been the Charity ‘bridge’ between S. Ann Dorenbusch, the last Sister of Charity on staff at Bishop Fenwick High School in Middletown, Ohio, in 1971, and S. Donna Bryant who began teaching at the school in 2008.

Patrice’s former teacher at Marian High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Rev. James O’Connor, was principal when she joined the staff – “because it was about the size of a school I was looking for. The third year I met my husband on a blind date. And I have had all three of my kids in my classes – a nice way to be involved in their lives,” she added.

Began in 1952 in a former three-story public school, Bishop Fenwick, a parochial coed high school, was staffed by priests of the Cincinnati Archdiocese, three Sisters of Charity (Sisters Charles Regina McCarthy, Mary Eudora Corbin and Edward Mary North) and three Oldenburg Franciscan Sisters, a lay art teacher, and a lay coach. The April 3, 1953, *Catholic Telegraph Register* called it the, “Biggest little school in southern Ohio.”¹ In 1962, the school moved to a new building on Manchester Road in Middletown to accommodate its growing enrollment. Since 2004 the school’s campus has been located on State Route 122 on the east side of Middletown.

In her 39th year, Patrice said, “I totally love kids. They are so much fun to be with. They have a care about each other - we don’t ‘boo’ each other [at Fenwick]. We have a family atmosphere, and it offers a good educational option among the many schools around.” Advanced placement, college preparatory and general studies form the curriculum.

A grandmother, Patrice is still teaching Spanish under its 11th principal, and amazed at “how many second-generation students I have taught.” In addition to Spanish, she has taught speech, personal typing, home economics and freshman religion. She also has served as secretary for the athletic director and in the main office.

Patrice has been an advisor to the Mission Club, National Honor Society and Urban Plunge; and she took students to Guatemala in 2000 and 2003 to help S. Sarah Mulligan in her



S. Donna Bryant (front) and Associate Patrice Harty are carrying on the Spirit of Charity as teachers at Bishop Fenwick High School in Middletown, Ohio.

clinic, which provides complete health care, educational programs and human services to the most needy families and individuals in the surrounding area. She takes part each year in at least one of the Kairos retreats for students.

For eight years Patrice worked in campus ministry while still teaching Spanish. “I loved campus ministry, but had to go back to the classroom because of the increased enrollment – at 553 this year from a low of 250 in the mid-1980s.” Fifteen percent of the students are not Catholic, but all attend religion classes. The Rev. Dave Endress, chaplain, senior religion teacher and one of the campus ministers, celebrates Mass every day before classes begin.

“With Fenwick’s faith-based atmosphere I can even talk about the Associate program of the Sisters of Charity and have had occasion to do just that,” Patrice said.

After 24 years teaching at Trinity Catholic High School in Trinidad, Colo., S. Donna Bryant said, “It was time to leave.” She updated her resume to send to schools around the country when a friend suggested she try schools in Ohio. Bishop Fenwick High School was the first to reply.

“I interviewed and began in August 2008,” S. Donna said. “They needed a religion teacher for my favorite area of theology.

“I fell in love with the freshmen. There is something about the young ... it’s their zest for living, the sparkle in their eyes that I love to meet.” And they loved her as the notes on her chalkboard and this year’s sophomores’ visits to her classroom testify.

S. Donna teaches six classes, ranging from 17 to 31 freshmen, depending on their schedules – Introduction to the Old Testament in the first semester and Introduction to the New Testament in the second. She shares ‘life’ stories with her students, emphasizing that no matter what their futures, they will be meeting challenges and need to prepare now for what will come.

S. Donna is surprised at the number of students who come back to visit and “the most, well-educated faculty I’ve been associated with.” She also is amazed at the faculty who come on board at lower salaries, especially in poor economic times.

Another surprise is the special program for students with learning disabilities at Fenwick who are mainstreamed but with individualized educational plans. “It is so well coordinated with representation from teachers, parents, guidance counselors and administration,” she explained, a real plus for a school of that size.

The Sister-Associate connection between S. Donna and Patrice has been beneficial to their students.

“One day [S. Donna] came to my classroom for a few minutes to talk about the difference between sisters, nuns and monastic life,” Patrice said. “We had been reading a story and the students were confused between sisters and nuns. Our greatest interaction is the friendship we share and the witness that is to the students. They often see us talking, etc.”

Patrice also has helped S. Donna to become computer literate, since the school’s attendance and grading system are both online.

“When S. Donna came to Fenwick last year she was totally unfamiliar with how to even login, so she has advanced quite far and is able

to do this on her own now,” Patrice said.

Personally their connection has been a blessing, as well.

“One very important memory I have,” Patrice said, “is sitting with S. Donna in our chapel at school last December and renewing my Associate commitment in her presence. Our small group had done this together earlier and I was on a Kairos retreat with our seniors at that time and could not be with them. S. Donna and I shared the reflection questions and prayed together. It was a very special time for both of us.”

Almost 60 years after the school opened, Bishop Fenwick High School remains committed to promoting “responsibility to self and community, stewardship of the environment and relationship with God.” Today Patrice and S. Donna are continuing to keep the spirit of the Sisters of Charity alive as they assist their students to reach their full potential.

¹Mahoney, S. Benedicta, *We Are Many ... The History of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati 1898-1971*, p.228.