

Sister Kathleen Feeley, legendary educator, pens history of School Sisters

By Mary K. Tilghman

Special to the Review

Sister Kathleen Feeley likens the School Sisters of Notre Dame to a skyscraper: strong and flexible enough to bend ever so slightly in the wind.

The president emerita of Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore has written a history of her order, "That Deeper Knowing," relating the stories of strong and flexible sisters from their arrival in Baltimore in 1847 until the Baltimore, Wilton and Chicago provinces merged in 2006.

Through the years, said Sister Kathleen, the sisters have remained strong in their faith and educational foundations.

"If they are well-grounded," she said, "they can be flexible."

A School Sister for 66 years, Sister Kathleen was asked by Sister Kathleen Cornell, provincial leader, to write "an authentic history" before the formation of the Atlantic-Midwest Province.

"It was for the sake of our sisters but also for the sake of the public, to tell the story of the sisters so it was known," Sister Loretta said.

"I've lived a lot of it," quipped Sister Kathleen, a Baltimore native.

"I enjoyed learning so much about a congregation that I love," she added, quoting Robert Frost: "I became only more sure of what I thought was true."

The book recalls religious women who always adapted, from teaching immigrants to answering the directives of the Second Vatican Council.

"We've been blessed in the people who have been called to the S.S.N.D.s," Sister Kathleen said. "I've been blessed to have met so many wonderful women."

She tells of many, among them a nurse in rural Mississippi; teachers in Eagle's Pass, Texas; a sister going alone to teach in Nigeria.

"I found all these wonderful little stories," she said. "Even we didn't know what the other sisters were doing."



Sister Kathleen said she most enjoyed writing the post-Vatican II history, when, she said, sisters "went out to the margins that (Pope) Francis is telling us to do." They ran parishes and became spiritual directors, founded the Caroline Center in

Baltimore and ministered overseas.

Flexibility has been important for Sister Kathleen's own work. As president of Notre Dame from 1971 to 1992, she oversaw the introduction of new programs, such as Weekend College and the English Language Institute, and opened the Loyola-Notre Dame Library.

She returned from Ghana in 2014, after nine years there teaching English and religion at a newly-instituted Catholic college, followed by a year teaching in the S.S.N.D. novitiate. The order, she said, is growing in Africa, which now has 49 native S.S.N.D.s, and 11 novices who will be professed in July.

Sister Kathleen took time out to return to Baltimore to write the book and serve as interim president of the Institute of Notre Dame, an all-girls school.

Now, said Sister Kathleen, "I've come home for good. Now I'm looking for the good - good things to do."

Sister Kathleen teaches English to three women through Asylee Women Enterprises, serves dinner at the Weinberg Center and is helping teenagers perfect their writing skills at the Esperanza Center, the latter two being programs of Catholic Charities of Baltimore.

Now that she's written about the past, what does Sister Kathleen have to say about her congregation's future?

"I think you'd have to be God to know that," she said, but added she believes God has a plan.

S.S.N.D. Associates may carry on the order's charism of unity - as will the strong institutions the sisters founded.

"What else is going to happen, I know not," she said.

To obtain a signed copy of Sister Kathleen's book, send a donation of any amount to Linda Beall, Villa Assumpta, 6401 N. Charles Street, Baltimore MD 21212

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