

# Sister M. Ferdinand celebrates her 70th anniversary

Sister Mary Ferdinand Tunis, R.S.M., celebrated 70 years as a nun and 88 years as a parishioner of St. Cecilia, Baltimore, on Dec. 23.

"I can't do too much with the parish but be their senior member," she said with a chuckle.

Her mother was a charter member of the parish, and it was while attending school there and at Mount St. Agnes that Sister M. Ferdinand realized she wanted to join the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

She became a postulant in 1937 and received her habit and religious name in 1938. "I made up my mind ahead of time I was going to like it no matter what name I got," she said. To this day, she wishes she had known that St. Ferdinand was the patron saint of engineers before her father died because he was an engineer.

She inherited her father's mathematical ability, graduating from College of Misericordia with a major in math and a minor in chemistry. She taught at Mount St. Agnes High School, as well as at schools in Florida and Virginia. She was among the first faculty of the brand-new Mercy High School in Baltimore in 1960, and she designed the school seal.

"We had to start the traditions," she said.

In 1971, she became involved in the Windsor Hills neighborhood, which was facing block-busting and tumultuous days of integration. She was impressed by the neighbors who vowed to stay and make a diverse community work.

"De-segregation is legal," she said. "Integration is attitude."

She used the few personal dollars she had to pay dues to join the Windsor Hills Neighbors Inc.

Sister M. Ferdinand moved into the neighborhood and applied for and received a

series of grants to fund her work in the community.

“I don’t call it outreach; I call it reach out,” she said.

She organized potluck dinners that brought neighbors together while raising funds to help area families. She distributed food to the needy, she started a learning center at the Windsor Hills Elementary School, and she helped illiterate adults learn to read.

She moved to The Villa 11 years ago - she dismisses her health concerns with a single, soft-spoken word: “limitations” - but still is a board member of the neighborhood association, keeping the ministry that occupied her for more than 30 years close to her heart.