

Area nun wraps up 55-year career

Hoying looks back fondly on decades of religious service

By AMY KRONENBERGER
akronenberger@dailystandard.com

MARIA STEIN — Whether teaching children or serving the faithful, Sister Barbara Ann Hoying has loved every step of her 55-year career.

Hoying, a Mercer County native, has retired her habit after serving the last 16 years as director at the Maria Stein Shrine of the Holy Relics. When current Shrine director Don Rosenbeck took over the position in 2010, Hoying released some of her duties to become director of mission and spirituality until her retirement at the end of June.

"I've loved it all; it's been a fulfilling life," she said. "I've touched many lives and been touched by many lives in this journey through my religious life and ministry."

Long before her time at Maria Stein Shrine, the little farm girl who grew up in Carthagena parish and went to Coldwater school knew she was destined to become a nun. She said the nuns who taught her through school and her aunt who was also a nun



Hoying

served as her inspiration.

"I was taught by a sister in every grade, loved them all; each one I wanted to be just like her," she said. "I loved the sisters' work and teaching, and I could imagine myself in a habit and writing on the board. They got to write on the board lots more than the students ... I always thought that would be a thrill.

"I believe though, more than the attraction of those women, it was God who was calling me. I had things in my life, time in my life when I know that God was in effect tapping me on my shoulder, whispering in my ear."

Hoying left her home after graduating eighth grade to join the convent and took her vows as a nun in 1959. Her first assignment was in St. Joseph, Mo., where she taught second and third grades. Her next assignment was in Cleveland where she taught first grade.

"I loved it, loved it. Those kids at that age are so moldable and so excited about their learning," she said. "I love little kids and so teaching first grade was really a high point in my life, not just because I love little kids but because they love learning and they show it."

Hoying's third assignment took her to Falls Church, Va., a suburb of Washington, D.C.

"So this little farm girl from Ohio goes to Falls Church, Va., next to the capital of our country," she said. "There I learned that even kids of military officers and government officials, they were like all the other kids ... It was a neat discovery about

life. Kids are the same the world over."

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated during Hoying's tenure in Falls Church. She said she remembered exactly where she was in the classroom when the news was announced on the public address system.

Through a connection with a congressman from Cleveland, Hoying and her fellow sisters were able to avoid the line of thousands of mourners and enter a side door at the Capital Building to view Kennedy's body.

"I watched Jackie and the two kids walk up the steps," she said, choking up. "And it still is very touching for me."

Hoying then received her master's degree in religious education from Fordham University in New York City and returned to Ohio when she was assigned to the Cincinnati Archdiocese for the first time. She served as director of religious education at Sacred Heart Parish in New Carlisle, and then returned to Mercer County to serve as director of the Retreat House in Maria Stein for six years.

"This was my first time in this particular area, which is home territory for me," she said. "I was doing retreat work ... and loved it, loved it."

Hoying then worked 15 years at St. Mary Seminary in Cincinnati before being asked to return to Maria Stein. She said the Retreat House was going to be closed and sold and the Shrine was to become the central focus.

Besides teaching, Hoying said the second highlight of her career was serving in Maria Stein:

"I love Maria Stein," she said. "It's a place where we started in 1846 two years after we came to this country. So I feel like I'm walking in the steps of giant women ... women of great faith, deep prayer and hard work. All those have a place in my heart because I grew up in that kind of atmosphere in my family."

Hoying said she considers it a privilege to meet and pray with those who visit the shrine and help them through hard times.

"Coming into work every day you didn't know what was going to be in the day and sometimes what was in your day was being able to be the Christ figure in their lives ... so that they could go on, so that their faith could be deepened and strengthened and you were just used as an instrument," she said. "For me that's all just very, very sacred, precious stuff. And I get to be a part of it."

Despite her retirement, Hoying has no plans to stop her service. She intends to return to the Shrine to help out anywhere she can.

"My plan is to just chill for a bit, just separate from what's been daily work, and then I will volunteer here wherever I'm needed," she said.

When not volunteering, Hoying plans to spend more time with friends and family and catch up on her reading.

"Nothing grand, just simple stuff," she said.