

Marie Rebecca Vonderhaar

Sister Marie Rebecca Vonderhaar was born Elizabeth Ann (her family always called her Betty). She was the oldest of four girls, with Marge, Mary Jane and Dorothy following.

She grew up in a loving family; her mother, Reba, was noted for her good cooking and hospitality. Her dad, Al, was not able to complete high school but became an avid reader and was a good challenge, even for others with master's degrees. He always encouraged his girls to be serious about their studies. Betty attended Christ the Good Shepherd grade school, but most of her education was in Lincoln Park Public Schools. In high school, she was a good student in the honor society, played flute in the band and participated in countless activities where she made numerous friends.

When praying about her future, she thought of religious life in a congregation dedicated to Mary and doing missionary work. After a year at Marygrove and getting to know the IHMs, she felt they were a good fit. Her first teaching assignments were in Michigan – junior high at St. Cyprian, Riverview and St. Charles, Newport – but her real wish was always to go to the overseas missions. In 1976, her dream was realized when the bishop of Ghana, West Africa, invited the IHMs to teach in his diocese. During the next 20 years she worked with students from many tribes – a real multicultural experience.



While at Notre Dame Minor Seminary in Ghana, Rebecca taught young men who went on to be wonderful lay leaders, priests, religious brothers and one, even a bishop. After seven years in the seminary, she and Sister Rose Graham, IHM, were invited to go to Gbewaah Teacher Training College in Pusiga, Ghana; a year later Sister Ann Aseltyne, IHM, joined them. The students were from various religious and tribal backgrounds,

each speaking their own language and having their own unique music and culture. During her 12 years there, Rebecca learned that she could be happy without indoor plumbing, electricity or local grocery stores.



Her last two years in Ghana, she was back in Navrongo at the Secondary School (a large residential school of more than 1,000 students). Each school during those years had its gifts and challenges.

After 20 years in Ghana and knowing her parents' health was failing, Rebecca returned to the United States and sought a meaningful ministry. She had always been responsible for

religious education classes wherever she was; she loved being able to help families whose children did not attend Catholic schools. How blessed she was, when after being away from her home parish for more than 35 years, there was an opening for director of religious formation! She has ministered at Christ

the Good Shepherd, Lincoln Park, for the last 25 years. There, she has found a very loving and supportive faith community!

The years have flown by. She thanks God for helping her along the road. "God, every moment of every day is gift. With a grateful heart ... THANKS!"

