

“ . . . I knew that I wanted to do something to help people, because God had given me so much.”

How I Heard God’s Call: Sister Mary Jo Polak heard God’s call through music and through parish and church activities. She made time and space to attend parish events and offer her talents to help others worship. In doing what she had the love for, the skills and talents to do, that she heard God’s call.

When I was a little girl I asked my Mom what I was like when I was born. She said that I was born almost a month later than I was expected and that in those days long-overdue babies often died or were physically or mentally handicapped. I also knew, from looking at letters and cards that were in my baby book, that a lot of people were praying for me before I was born.

I always felt somehow special because of that. I felt that God must have wanted me around for something special, since I was born safe and sound after all the things that could have gone wrong. Not only was I not mentally challenged, but I was pretty smart, so I figured that I was supposed to use my brains for something. That’s why, when my Mom and my teachers told me things like “do your best.” I tried to listen to them and use my



talents. I played the organ in my home parish all through high school and college.

When I started thinking about what I would do when I grew up, I knew that I wanted to do something to help people, because God had given me so much. I saw my parents helping in our local parish and in our family. I also had the example of two aunts and five older cousins who had entered religious life. I loved reading about the saints and found the ways that they helped others.

I was pretty quiet and studious in high school and I didn’t feel ready to enter the convent when I graduated. I went on to college and began teaching in Catholic schools, and as a music teacher, was always involved in helping at parish liturgies. Of course, I also had friends and dated. Then I went to graduate school in Kirksville, Truman State. It was there that I met priests and sisters who were ministering in a way that really excited me, building community, helping people who were hurting. God was also tugging on my heart, inviting me to a deeper relationship. I asked myself, “What would make me happy in my life?” and I knew that I was happiest when I was praising and serving God and helping others. So I decided to “give it a try.” I’ve been with the Benedictine Sisters for 31 interesting years this year—so it worked!



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