

Sister Mary Beena in Covington, Kentucky, USA

April 2017

Notre Dame Sister Mary Beena from the Patna Province (India) visited the Covington Sisters of Notre Dame in late March. Sister Mary Beena lived at the Covington Province in 1982 while earning her master's degree from Xavier University.

After completing her studies at Xavier, Sister Mary Beena returned to India and served as a physics teacher for nine years, a principal at two different schools for 19 years, and, most recently, as provincial superior in Patna.

Despite being away for 35 years, Sister Mary Beena described her brief return to Covington as a homecoming. She recounted memories of practicing singing and serving supper every evening with Sisters Mary Margaret Droege, Mary Jolene Flynn, and the late Mary Renee Nienaber. Although much of her time was devoted to studying and attending class in 1982, she enjoyed the day-to-day life with her sisters and felt at home right away.

"I had good friends here," Sister Mary Beena said. "We lived as one community and despite the changes that come with three decades, it is nice to see and experience that the spirits of the sisters is still here."

Applying Her U.S. Experience in India

The roots for an SND presence in India were planted by Chardon SNDs in 1949. In 1961, the Patna Province was officially established with a focus on providing education to girls and marginalized women. Sister Mary Beena explained that due to vast inequality in India and the challenge of no roads and no electricity in the Patna region, making education accessible is very important. She emphasized education's role as a tool for individual and community empowerment.

Sister Mary Beena has seen the effects of that empowerment firsthand.

"I now enjoy that students from Patna are doing wonderful things," Sister Mary Beena beamed. "I can see the fruit of our work all over. Our students are globally placed, even in the U.S."

In fact, Sister Mary Beena spent a morning during her March visit with a former Notre Dame Academy, Patna, student who was enrolled at the University of Kentucky.

Sister Mary Beena credits some of their students' success to the influence of the global Notre Dame community. She explained that she was grateful to receive a master's of education in the United States and to experience the American education system as a student. Seeing what she described as a more application-based and practical approach influenced her teaching style in India.

Sister Mary Beena said, "The beauty of the Sisters of Notre Dame is that wherever we are, we are upholding the same mission and charisma, but doing so within our own cultures and countries."



(left to right) Sr. Bernamarie Lauer (Covington), Sr. Mary Beena (Patna), and Manisha (NDA Patna grad who is studying in Kentucky)