



SISTER FRANCIS BISLAND, CPS

Sister Francis was born Sophia Bisland in Paisley, a small town just outside of Glasgow, Scotland, the seventh of 13 children. She was known to be a spirited, fun-loving, but faith-filled child. Sophia was expelled from Catholic school and went to work in the weaving mills, but wanted to see more of the world, so she decided to leave Paisley. She began working with people with developmental disabilities in the local institutions. Those were the days when people with developmental disabilities were not treated with the same dignity and respect as their normal sisters and brothers.

Over the course of several years Sophia worked with mentally challenged people in Scotland, England and Australia. She began not only to care for God's special people, she began to teach. As a result, several places she worked at began to embrace the concept of each individual living up to their full potential, whatever that may be. Eventually her work brought her to the United States.

She worked at St. Vincent's Home for Children in Philadelphia for a short while, before moving to Michigan where she became involved in the deinstitutionalization movement, fighting for the rights of people with disabilities to live in the wider community and have the same rights as every citizen. While attending Temple University in Philadelphia, Sophia met the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, whom she joined in 1976, and become known as Sr. Francis.

Upon becoming a Sister, she moved to Reading, PA, where she opened the John Paul II Center for Special Learning. While running the John Paul II Center, she met many parents who were looking for homes for their children with intellectual disabilities. Through the grace of God and the support of many, the first group home was opened in Reading in 1991. One of the residents of that first group home was the sister of Sister Barbara Deitrich, CSR. Before long, Sr. Francis' endeavor expanded to five homes, in addition to offering respite care, family living and a day program.



As you can see, Sr. Francis is a woman of many talents. So, it did not come as a surprise that over the years she was elected to fill a variety of different leadership roles within our North American Province. Never one to rest on her laurels, in recent years Sr. Francis was invited to move to Canada to take on the responsibility of administrator of St. Bernard's Residence in Toronto. Turns out that she does not only have a soft spot for those with disabilities, but also for the elderly.

As we all know, God's ways are not always our ways. Far away from Toronto, the Holy Redeemer Sisters in Philadelphia, engaged in some strategic planning, and identified an unmet need to serve adults with intellectual disabilities. Soon thereafter the opportunity arose to launch such a new ministry - the *Dale Ziple Home* for adults with intellectual disabilities. Guess what? The Sisters knew exactly who the right person was to run this home. Someone they knew about, someone with compassion, love and plenty of experience to manage the program - Sr. Francis!

The Sisters, who had become familiar with Sr. Francis through Sr. Barbara's sibling, contacted Sr. Francis to see if she would consider being the program manager and assist the Sisters in their efforts to expand this ministry. In consultation with our provincial leadership team Sr. Francis accepted the offer, and so began another new chapter in her life. Valiant as always, and ready for a new challenge, she said, "You have to trust. Trust is the key. I have an absolute total belief that this ministry will take off, because it is God's work." And it did. Anything this valiant woman puts her hand to, flies!

