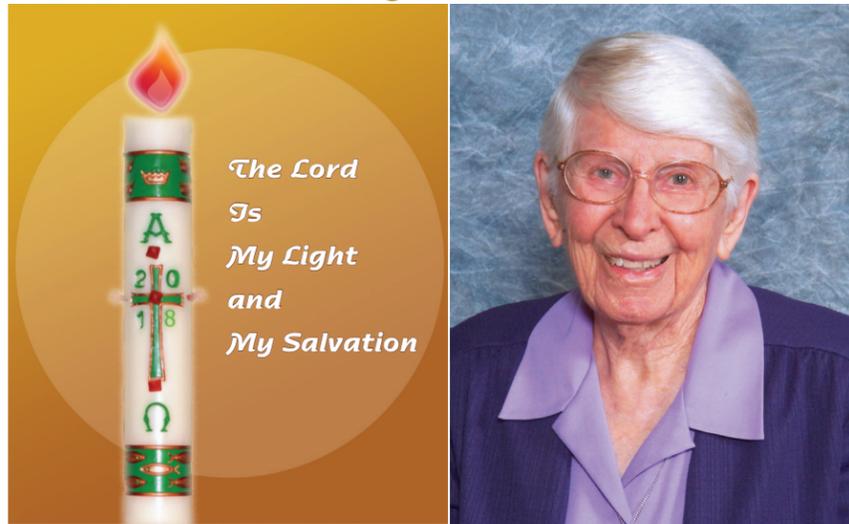


Remembering



Mary Brigid Fitzpatrick, CSJ

December 17, 1921 — June 7, 2018

Mary Catherine Fitzpatrick was born in Cisco, Texas to parents James Fitzpatrick, a native of County Down, Ireland, and Mabel Keough, a native of Pennsylvania, on December 17, 1921. She was the first-born child in a family of 7 children: 5 girls and 2 boys. It is no surprise that the Fitzpatrick family nurtured the Catholic faith in all their children: Mary Catherine, Helen, John, Arthur, Therese, Agnes and Anne. All her siblings married and raised families steeped in the faith. (Her brother, Art, was ordained a permanent deacon in 1981, and her sister, Helen, was married to Al Antczak, the longtime editor of the Los Angeles catholic newspaper, *The Tidings*.)

The Fitzpatrick's were a close-knit family but had no relatives in Los Angeles. James Fitzpatrick was a WWI veteran, and then worked as an insurance broker and in real estate until the Depression of 1929 left most of the country reeling. Supporting a family of 9, when jobs were so hard to find, made life very difficult. Though

James found work with the WPA, and as an officer and a watchman for the City and the County of Los Angeles, the pay was inadequate to support a Catholic education. Father John Egan, pastor of St. Brigid's school, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet were responsible for helping each Fitzpatrick child complete both elementary and high school Catholic education despite growing up in such hard times... Mary Catherine's parents had an enduring confidence in God, and were blessed by the support of the pastor and the CSJ Community.

It was during her school years at St. Mary's Academy that Mary Catherine's religious vocation was identified by others. Though the call surfaced repeatedly, it was set aside until Mary Catherine's senior year. A major influence on helping make a decision was Sister Rosaleen Lynch, who was Mary Catherine's 6th and 7th grade teacher at St. Brigid's.

The idea of a religious vocation was received by Mary Catherine's parents

with happiness and encouragement. Surprisingly, when Mary Catherine sought the approval of her pastor, he suggested (to her) that she enter the Sisters of Social Service since they were in charge of Sodality at St. Brigid's. Mary Catherine's immediate response was that she could NEVER do Social Work!

After graduating from St. Mary's Academy, Mary Catherine entered the Sisters of St. Joseph Postulancy on Sept. 15, 1939. (The program was housed at St. Mary's.) She received the habit and the name Sister Mary Brigid on March 19, 1940, made her first vows on March 19, 1942, and pronounced her final vows on August 15, 1945.

Mary Brigid's ministerial life was characterized by her generous response to call, and the needs of the community, and not by her own choices. Her first mission experience was at St. Boniface Indian School where she was sent right after first vows. Next she taught at St. Cecilia's and primary grades at St. Mary's Academy.

Immediately after final vows, Sr. Mary Brigid was sent to Mount St. Mary's College as a full-time student, an unusual assignment at this young stage of religious life. Upon completing her B.A. from the Mount, with a social welfare major, Sr. Mary Brigid was sent to Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C., to obtain her M.S.W. (master's in social work). Besides studying, and befriending other religious women who were likewise studying there, Sr. Mary Brigid worked full-time as a psychiatric social worker at the on-site Child Center.

With Master's degree in hand, Sr. Mary Brigid returned to the Mount to teach and serve as student counselor, a service she willingly gave for seven years. Then, the Community sent Sr. Mary Brigid to the University of Notre Dame, in Indiana, to obtain a Ph.D. in Sociology.

Upon her return to the Province, Ph.D. in hand, Sr. M. Brigid was appointed Dean of Faculty and Graduate Students. Though Sr. Mary Brigid imagined her higher studies would enhance her teaching, she accepted the administrative responsibilities with characteristic openness. She soon was appointed Superior as well at the Doheny campus.

In 1965, Sr. Mary Brigid's life trajectory took a big turn. She was appointed Assistant Provincial. She held this position for three years, followed by appointment as Provincial Superior from 1968 to 1974. Note: serving as leader of one of the largest communities of women religious on the West Coast shortly after the massive changes brought about by Vatican II required a person with personal, intellectual and spiritual gifts. Perhaps her studies in social welfare and sociology were particularly needed during this period of religious cultural shift.

If one were to describe the role during this tumultuous time, it can be compared to Edison's quest for just the right material for his remarkable invention of the light bulb. He found it in a thread-like filament which would hold a charge for thousands of hours, thus providing continuous light.

Sister Mary Brigid was OUR filament of light—listening with openness and compassion, grieving the loss of so many sisters and schools, and supporting the beginning of new ministries to serve the dear neighbor. Through these shifting times, Sr. Mary Brigid's light did not dim.

After holding the highest office in our CSJ community, Sr. Mary Brigid generously accepted an appointment as Regional Superior for a term of 3 years. This ministry was followed by

the one ministry that Sr. Mary Brigid actually asked for. In her own words: "I asked to become a school secretary and live in community at St. Anselm's in order to experience the local reality of Vatican II changes in our congregation which I had tried to help implement as provincial."

While still serving as secretary, Mary Brigid once again responded to being sent: this time to Mount St. Mary's College to serve in the Academic Advisement Center where she served for six years while living in four separate communities including the Novitiate community. From service as an advisor, Sr. Mary Brigid was once again called to something new. The newly appointed Archbishop of Los Angeles, Roger Mahony, requested a sister of St. Joseph to serve as his Administrative Assistant. With characteristic openness, once again Sr. Mary Brigid was sent to a ministry she would never have imagined upon entering. Eventually her title changed to Special Assistant to the Cardinal. Sr. Mary Brigid served at the L.A. Archdiocese from 1985 to 2003, a period of approximately 18 years. She stayed on to volunteer in the Cardinal's office until 2011.

Sister Mary Brigid's spirit of adventure surfaced when a group of her contemporaries requested to begin a community geared to the interests of those of similar age and experience, to be housed at St. Joan of Arc convent. They proposed to prepare their own meals, take care of the home as much as possible, and pray together. This community of elders was a great witness to so many as they often invited younger members to share a feast or celebration.

The group continued these plans until the declining health of the members led to a decision to discontinue. It was then around June

of 2012 that Sr. Mary Brigid came to live and be a vital part of Holy Family Community, joining in activities, prayers, and outings until her health began to fail.

Throughout her life Sister Mary Brigid displayed a remarkable humility, approachability and could truly listen with discernment. She was a beloved friend. She loved to sing, and spent many years in the Mount chorus. She joked that early on her voice was likened to a cello, then astoundingly she was told by Professor Brownstead she was a soprano! She delighted in singing a solo in the community's production of "Grannie's Goodies".

When weakness engulfed her tiny body Mary Brigid agreed to hospice care. She was comforted by her beloved family members, principally her 32 nieces and nephews and their families, who have always honored her as the Matriarch figure in their lives. Many loyal friends dropped by, or made known what a gift her direction, leadership and/or friendship had been. Mary Brigid was called to her heavenly home on June 7, 2018. And as always, she responded gracefully. Her light did not go out, its focus shifted from around us to above, uniting with Christ's light in which we live and move and have our being. ✞

~Written by Sister Annette Debs, CSJ