



Remembering

Eileen Parker, CSJ

December 17, 1929 – September 3, 2018

Eileen Frances Parker was born in Evanston, Illinois, during a furious December blizzard. Her parents were immigrants. Harold Walter Parker was born in Portsmouth, England; her mother, Catherine Caroline Kenny, was born in Tallow, County Waterford, Ireland. They met on a voyage from Africa to England. Eileen once shared, "My grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins lived in England during the Blitz in World War II, so we saved our ration stamps and then sent food to them while praying the ship would not be sunk."

Eileen's younger sister, Sheila, entered the Medical Missionary Sisters several years before Eileen's entrance into the Sisters of St. Joseph. Her ministry began in Philadelphia and brought her to England, New Mexico, Georgia, Indonesia and Maryland.

Eileen attended Catholic schools: St. Jerome Elementary School in

Chicago staffed by the BVM Sisters; St. Scholastica Academy for high school, her teachers there were Benedictines. At Mundelein College she again had the BVM Sisters. Eileen said her fifth grade teacher once suggested that she be a sister. But God had other plans for her first. In October, 1949, during her junior year in college, she and her girlfriend enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve. It was just a lark, they thought it would be fun going to Navy Pier for two hours a week and getting paid for it. But in July, 1950, the Korean War broke out and they were mobilized to help support the troops. Though she was never sent overseas, she was stationed in almost every corner of the United States and rose quickly in rank over the seven years in the Women's Marine Corps.

While in the service, Eileen took the opportunity to become a member of the first Woman Marine

Officer Class, and held various administrative positions in Parris Island (South Carolina), San Diego, Los Angeles and Quantico (Virginia). In Los Angeles she worked for "Toys for Tots", spoke to various audiences about available careers in the Marines and arranged publicity shots for the Marines.

One day, Eileen met a Jesuit priest at Blessed Sacrament Church in Hollywood, and they talked about her latent religious vocation. Though a commissioned officer, she realized there was MORE to life, and resigned her commission. On February 11, 1957, she entered religious life at St. Mary's House of Studies and was among the older members in her group. She received the habit and religious name Sister Rose Eileen on August 15, 1957. Sister pronounced first vows on August 15, 1959, and final vows on August 6, 1964. In 1968 she returned to her baptismal name, Eileen.

Sister Eileen attended Mount Saint Mary's College and finally finished her college education, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics in 1960. She also earned a Master's Degree in Mathematics in 1975, from Cal State University Northridge, and, in 1987, a Certificate in Gerontology from Cal State, Fresno.

Sister Eileen's first mission as a young sister was teaching math and religion at Bishop Montgomery High School in Torrance in 1961. After almost 20 years as a math and religion teacher in several of our high schools, she was drawn to other direct service ministries. She served as Executive Secretary for the Freewheelers in San Francisco; then as Director of Senior Affairs for the Diocese of Fresno for

13 years. She received a grant that led to becoming Director of the Information and Referral Program which facilitated ministry to at least 63,000 elderly persons. She initiated a television program to discuss senior services on Senior Scene, a weekly 30-minute program on the Diocese of Fresno television station. Directors of Programs for low income seniors were invited to appear on her show.

In 1995, she attended the White House Conference on Aging as a Veteran delegate invited by a cabinet member of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. She also attended the Black Catholic Congress in Washington, D.C.

When Eileen's sister, Sheila, returned from Indonesia and was battling cancer, Eileen was missioned to Baltimore, Maryland. She monitored Sheila's care while also serving at Oak Crest Village Retirement Center as pastoral associate, and to Medbank of Maryland as a volunteer chaplain. In 2002, following Sheila's death, she returned to California and was missioned to Alma Via of Camarillo as chaplain, where she ministered for six years.

After a fall requiring shoulder and hip surgery, Eileen's health and mobility were seriously compromised and she realized that she needed to consider retirement. On February 15, 2008, she became a member of Holy Family Community at Carondelet Center. Always an avid reader, she enjoyed reading "good" newspapers, magazines, books, and struggled with her computer to maintain contacts with her many relatives and friends around the world. Retirement agreed with her. She said, at her 60th Jubilee in 2017, "I am experiencing gratitude, peace and joy with my long-ago request to

be accepted for membership in the CSJ community. Even with my many foibles, I've been given graces that enabled me to serve others in ways that have benefited them."

We could say that Sister Eileen possessed an extremely clever mind and held very high standards. She was loyal and caring towards her friends. She delighted in the companionship of Finn, her faithful and extraordinary dog. She was supremely self-confident and independent and, in her bright, frank manner, she always let you know where you stood with her. She loved her sisters and the staff who cared for her in her own way. While very witty and intelligent, she could also be fiery, some-times sharp, always honest.

But now, Sister Eileen, may you rest at last from your labors, knowing you were loved and now can fully enjoy the peace of Christ.

~ Written by Sister Francis Baker, CSJ

