



Remembering

Sister Margaret Ellen (Maggie) McGraw, CSJ

June 15, 1929 — December 22, 2019

Born in Detroit, Michigan, Margaret Mary McGraw was the third child born to parents Thomas Patrick McGraw, and Margaret Ellen McNulty. Her father was born in Leitrem, Ireland, and her mother in London, Ontario, Canada. Her parents greatly valued Catholic education, thus Margaret Mary attended Holy Redeemer Elementary and High School with her two older brothers Thomas and John. When Maggie was just seven years old her mother tragically died along with her baby while giving birth. Three years later her father married Martha Kloss, and Maggie was blessed with two new brothers and two new sisters within five years. Ronald, Kathleen, Brian and Betty Ann became a part of the McGraw family and Maggie felt a great responsibility to care for them, a textbook gentle and caring "big sister."

Growing up in a household of nine was not an easy life for her. She devotedly watched over her new brothers and sisters and guided them along their way. She gave up her social life to be the best daughter

and sister she could be. As a child Maggie often attended daily mass and midweek novenas. Over the years, Maggie became close to her 19 nieces and nephews, often praying for their needs and well being.

After working for several years after high school, she was asked to move to California to care for an aging aunt, and in return the aunt would put Maggie through college. Maggie accepted the offer, moved to Santa Monica and enrolled at Mount Saint Mary's College where she first met the Sisters of St. Joseph. During her junior year of nursing studies, she decided to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Maggie entered the CSJ Community on September 15, 1953 as a Postulant at the former St. Mary's Academy. Her reception into religious life, receiving the habit and name Sister Margaret Ellen, in honor of her mother, occurred on March 19, 1954 at the same site. First profession followed in March 19, 1956 at Mount Saint Mary's College chapel as the

chapel at Carondelet Center was not yet built. Maggie was in the very first group of novices to finish the Novitiate at the House of Studies at Carondelet Center. She then pronounced final vows at the House of Studies on August 15, 1961.

After finishing the novitiate and her nursing studies, Maggie was assigned to Daniel Freeman Hospital in Inglewood, then missioned to St. Joseph Hospital, Lewiston, Idaho, and then St. Joseph Hospital in Tucson, Arizona. She worked her way up from floor nurse to director of nursing. As director of nursing, she felt the need for more education. She went to UCLA for a master's degree in psychiatric nursing. At one time, Maggie revealed that she was told to be sure to cover any psychiatry books as at the time Psychiatry was somewhat suspect. While at UCLA Maggie became involved in the Newman Club. That involvement led to a career change; she began her ministry as a campus minister. She wrote, "I was the first one in our community to go into campus ministry. That was in 1970 at UCLA." Maggie was particularly well-equipped for relating to young collegiates as she was wise, balanced and had a practical spirituality. Subsequently, Maggie worked on a second advanced degree, a master's in applied spirituality from the University of San Francisco.

In 1983 Maggie, ever adventurous as well as generous, volunteered in response to a Congregational call to spend a year in the refugee camps on the border of Cambodia and Thailand. She absorbed the culture and her basic values were greatly influenced for the better by the mission. She shared about the poor and how the people in

camps made do with the very little they had. It gave her a sense of what was really important in life and relationships. She wrote, "When I volunteered to help these people it was with mixed feelings. The work looked so overwhelming and even the idea of traveling half way across the world was frightening. I saw many people who had been shot by the Vietnamese; many maimed and mutilated by land mines and at least three to four deaths occurred each week of people ranging in age from 12 years to the early 30's." This experience was a catalyst to Maggie's views of mission and orientation to the poor. as recommended by Vatican II.

When Maggie returned to California, she accepted a position at Sacred Heart Parish in San Jose, California. Besides ministering at the parish, Maggie eventually became the primary care-taker for Father Mateo Sheedy, pastor. The level of care Father Mateo received was influenced by the call to gentleness she developed in the refugee camps. She became more aware of people as individuals. For her each individual became a member of God's family, deserving of care and respect, in spite of great variety and diversity. Maggie was gifted with great vitality which she poured out unstintingly on others.

In 2002 Maggie was awarded the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice papal award. She was named for this honor by Bishop Patrick J. McGrath. In her acclaim he said: "This award is but a small sign of my sincere gratitude for all you have done through the years for the Diocese of San Jose."

Throughout her years of active ministry, Maggie served as nurse, educator, counselor, campus and

prison minister, spiritual director, trustee, and regional superior. She had an adventuresome spirit, loved to travel, and almost anywhere she went, including South America, she made friends and contacts. Maggie was good about keeping in touch with her friends and family. She was not afraid of taking a risk. In the early 70's she was part of an intentional community made up of sisters from a variety of ministries, the first of its kind approved by the Los Angeles leadership.

Maggie rarely had an unspoken thought! Hers was a searching, restless mind, seeking new avenues for wellness and healing. She read a wide range of books and enjoyed discussing them or passing on the book to others. With generosity of heart, she frequently shared a good book by reading it to Sister Veronica Maloney who was going blind.

Maggie could be described as contrary, outspoken, sometimes intolerant, and often the life of the party. She knew every Irish song

and could lead everyone in every verse. Those who lived with her in community say she could keep them laughing all evening, she had a wonderful, witty sense of humor. She was always a nurse, to her core.

Now Maggie, may you live in the newness of life, exploring all the possibilities and varieties in heaven and dwelling with our gentle, always accepting, loving God. ❖

~ Written by Sister Frances Baker with some assistance from Sister Annette Debs

