



Remembering

Sister Catherine Marie Kreta, CSJ
March 22, 1933 - September 8, 2020

*"The greatest thing you can do in this life is to cultivate and practice compassion."
~ Robert Lax, poet and contemplative*

Marilyn Ann Kreta was born and raised in Los Angeles. Most likely her parents, Stephen Marvin and Fern Marie Clothier, realized at an early age that they had a highly energetic and intelligent baby. Her parents were both converts to Roman Catholicism. Her mother had been raised a Methodist and her father was Russian Orthodox. Two of her relatives were Russian Orthodox priests who served in Alaska. She once shared that the name Kreta means "chalk" in Russian, and she speculated that perhaps she came from a long line of teachers.

Stephen and Fern had two children. Ed, who is deceased, was Marilyn's older brother. They were close and liked to tease each other. With his wife Bonnie, Ed had five children. Her nephews and niece love their aunt and have been supportive of Cath. They are Ken, Eileen, Mike, Marty, and Dennis. Ed's second wife Suzanne had two children; Matt, and Jennifer who is deceased.

Marilyn's earliest education took place in Catholic schools. She attended Nativity Elementary School conducted by the Sisters of Loretto, graduating in 1948. Her high school years were spent at Catholic Girls High School (now Bishop Conaty), where she graduated in 1951. Given her height, she enjoyed sports, especially volleyball, basketball and tennis. It was in high school that she first met the Sisters of St. Joseph. Several other religious communities also taught at Catholic Girls High. Sister Sheila McCarthy was a great influence in her life and helped her when it was time to enter. Entering the community was not a difficult decision. Cath once shared, "From the time I was a little girl I felt a call to the religious life, and I had several experiences that confirmed it for me. I was attracted to the charisma of the Carondelet sisters, which is reconciliation and unity. The sisters had a certain manner that brought unity among others."

Following high school graduation, Marilyn entered the Sisters of St. Joseph on September 15, 1951. She received the habit and religious name Sister Catherine Marie on March 19, 1952. She made first vows on March 19, 1954 and pronounced final vows on August 15, 1959. In 2012 she celebrated her 60th Jubilee as a Sister of St. Joseph.

Cath, as she was so commonly known, knew well how to connect with the power of God as energy and strength for life. Her many involvements and positions speak of boundless energy and enthusiasm. Fr. Medaille's instruction to the first Sisters of St. Joseph that their service should encompass "all of which woman is capable" was most likely intended as a directive for the scope of ministries undertaken by the entire community. In many ways, however, "all of which woman is capable" describes the incredibly wide and varied range of Cath's own personal ministerial life.

Before she received her bachelor's degree, she was assigned to a classroom of 65 children in Pasco, Washington. Unfamiliar with all the far-flung CSJ missions, she mistakenly told her mother she was going to Washington, DC. Cath loved being in Pasco, and considered teaching a great privilege. In the following years, she was missioned to parish schools in Washington, Arizona, and California. Recognizing her leadership and organizational abilities, she was then appointed as school principal, and ultimately as supervisor of education for all the CSJ elementary schools in the Province, at that time numbering about 75 schools. In those years, because of the decreasing number of sisters available for teaching, Cath's responsibilities included making difficult decisions regarding the withdrawal of sisters from a number of schools where we served. During her service in these educational ministries, she earned her bachelor's degree from Mount St. Mary's College and a master's degree in educational administration from Cal State Northridge, as well as elementary and secondary teaching credentials.

Following her years in elementary education, Cath earned a master's degree in Christian spirituality from Creighton University and served as spiritual director for sisters and lay persons. Prior to her years in leadership, Cath served as director of the Personal Development Office while also serving as an elementary school principal. She spent nine years in province leadership; three years as assistant provincial and then six years from 1986 - 1992 as provincial in the Los Angeles Province, with responsibility for 600 sisters. As provincial, she was especially supportive of efforts to give life to the vision of CSJ Associates.

In 1992-93, following her years in province leadership, Cath enjoyed a year's sabbatical. She traveled to the Holy Land and Europe, and studied Spanish for three months in Mexico. She then served as the program and retreat director for the Center for Spiritual Development in Orange, California, partnering with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. From 1994 -2002, in generous response to a real need for health care for the poor, Cath served in administration at Santa Marta Hospital, a position she greatly enjoyed, and to which she attracted other CSJ's to minister, particularly those who spoke Spanish. Of her time at Santa Marta, she said she could hardly wait to go to work every morning.

For over ten years, Cath served as Justice Coordinator for the Province. During this time she designed a process to educate sisters and associates to respond to identified issues of injustice, she initiated public demonstrations in support of peace and non-violence, and was the driving force in forming a collaboration with seven religious congregations and other agencies to work for justice in areas of human abuse, especially human trafficking.

Cath lent her passion, skill and experience to a number of boards of directors. She served on the Board of Directors and later as President of the Board of CAST (Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking). She was a Member of the Health Care Corporation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, St. Louis, MO; of the Carondelet Health System Board of Directors, a Member of the hospital boards in Inglewood, CA, Tucson, AZ, and Pasco WA. She also served as a Trustee on the Board of Mount St. Mary's College.

In May of 2018, Cath was chosen by CAST to be one of the recipients of the Founders' Changemakers Award. Recognizing her service and leadership, the program for that event read in part: "Rallying the local and global community to end exploitation and violence, her legacy will be the hundreds of trafficking victims who have found freedom, healing, and their own vocation to leadership."

In the 1970s Cath made a thirty-day retreat. She shared that one of the gifts of that experience that had a profound affect on her were the words of Jesus' prayer for his disciples: "Consecrate them in the truth." Even a brief reflection on Cath's life reveals her commitment to live in truth, with integrity and understanding. This was evident in her relationships, her decision making, her interactions, her leadership. She was honest and forthright. At times this meant saying what was difficult, but never without compassion. She was also generous in recognizing and acknowledging the goodness and giftedness of others in a way that encouraged them to strive to realize potential. For her, truth was not something static, but rather something we continue to grow into. Truth unfolds and reveals itself in new and deepening ways as we live and grow. Ultimately, commitment to truth means a willingness to change and to embrace the more.

It cannot be left unsaid that any remembrance of Cath and her life must acknowledge that she was a proud, died-in-the-wool, self-proclaimed priss., What she wore, how her hair looked, mattered to her and she wasn't ashamed to admit it.

Cath began her ministry of prayer and witness in Holy Family Community on June 20, 2016. Throughout her life, she had an understanding and compassionate heart. Her interest in reading and films was very broad and extensive. Those who have lived with her in community over the years relate that Cath was fun, had a good sense of humor, could easily laugh at herself, was generous, a good cleaner, and enjoyed a turn in the kitchen. Her specialties were mixing Margaritas and making tostadas. While her ministries often meant she was away at meetings, when she was home with the sisters she was genuinely interested in them and in their life together.

We will miss Cath's warm and gracious laugh. Heaven, no doubt, is the richer for her loving presence. We and so many others continue to be blessed by her energy, example and passion for justice.

~ Written by Sister Frances Baker, CSJ