



Remembering

SISTER ELAINE STEPHAN
August 24, 1937– October 11, 2020

God's will began for Elaine Clara Stephan when she was born on August 24, 1937 in Los Angeles, California to Carl Stephan and Margaret Novetske. Her father was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and her mother in Westville, Illinois. Her parents were of German and Lithuanian heritage. Her father was an auto mechanic and her mother was a homemaker. Elaine was the oldest of three children, her sister Irene who was 1½ years younger and her brother Larry who was six years younger. The family lived in El Sereno and then moved to Glendale when Elaine was eight years old. She and her sister were able to enroll in Incarnation Grammar School through the kindness of the pastor.

Growing up with her sister Irene was fun. Her brother Larry was too young to join their outings. The girls were frequent passengers on the streetcars to the movies, swimming, violin and piano lessons and performing in the youth orchestra at the Hollywood Bowl.

When Elaine went to Incarnation School in Grade 3, she was attracted to the BVM Sisters who taught there and the seed of her vocation was planted. Though she earnestly wanted to continue her Catholic education in high school, the family couldn't afford the tuition. So she went to Hoover High School. Ever resourceful Elaine figured out that if she got a job she could help with tuition. When she was old enough she got a job in a bubble bath factory and was able to help with the tuition. She switched to Bellarmine-Jefferson Catholic High School in Burbank for her junior and senior year.

Her desire to become a sister intensified and she asked Sr. Francella, one of the high school faculty, for information about congregations who had a nursing ministry. Sr. Francella told her that the BVMs didn't have a nursing apostolate but she would do some research. She found three communities in California, one of them being the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. Elaine wrote to all three and received written responses from two and a telephone call from the CSJs. She went to see Sr. Rose Bernard. She was sold...She liked the habit and she did not have to be a nurse before entering.

Elaine entered on September 15, 1955. She received the habit and the name Sister Carl Margaret in honor of her parents on March 19, 1956. She pronounced first vows on March 19, 1958 and final vows on August 6, 1963.

She studied nursing for two years but changed to elementary education. She received a B.A. in Education from Mount St. Mary's College (University). Assigned to primary grades, mainly second grade, Elaine taught in eight schools spanning from Torrance, California to Pasco, Washington. She was missioned every two years which prompted her father to say that being a Sister was like being in the army...you moved around a lot. Her family kept up with these moves by visiting every community where she taught, including Pasco, Washington.

A tragic blow came in 19 with the death of her brother Larry who was killed in the Vietnam War. His death was a terrible blow to the family.

While making her yearly retreat, Fr. Quinn Connor O.Carm. the retreat director, told her that she would be good working with alcoholics and drug addicts. She thought "He's nuts!" But she gave his suggestion serious thought and talked it over with her regional. She was encouraged to pursue it.

In September 1976 Elaine began her new ministry which would span 37 years. She volunteered for one year in the chemical dependency area at St. Joseph's Hospital in Tucson, Arizona. Then she worked for the next year at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange gaining field experience. Now she was ready to prepare herself professionally and enrolled in the Alcohol Studies Program at Seattle University 1979-1980. She earned two certificates—one in Basic Studies and the other in Advanced Studies.

After she completed the courses, she ministered at Daniel Freeman Marina Hospital, residential treatment at Kazi

House, Patterns Behavioral Health Services and Family Services of Los Angeles. She also worked at House of Yahweh and Didi Hirsch Community Center. Her last position was in drug prevention in the Culver City schools.

When Elaine retired, she volunteered at A Place Called Home where she tutored 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade students in their homework. She encouraged them to complete their work, managed behavior problems and one Christmas provided a neglected boy with presents which she purchased.

Now what about the woman herself? What gave her joy, satisfaction, stress irritation? Ask Sister Sean Patrice who lived with her for 33 years. Sean said, "We were like sandpaper and silk." Someone asked, "Which one were you?" She answered, "We took turns." And so...Follow the rules be they Church's or a recipe. Be on time and go the shortest way, her way, to get there. Tell her about my class at school and she would share about whom she met on her walk. She enjoyed crossword puzzles and word find puzzles, working on them while we watched Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune. How she loved to shout out the answers before the contestants did!

Zest for movies followed Elaine all her life. She had several movie buddies. What could be better than a trip to In and Out Burger after a good show!

Love for chocolate could lure her out for a slice of mud pie with a friend. And the delicious chocolate chip cookies "funeral cookies" I would bring home after a CSJ funeral.

When ice skating season arrived, she was ready with the schedule received either from her sister Irene or Sister Josefa. How she loved the competitions and could give you stats on the famous skaters! Through all these activities and ministries, Elaine was accomplishing God's will. Prayer was the highlight of her day. Regular periods of contemplation and spiritual reading. She prayed the entire rosary on her daily walks. In her notes she wrote "Pray constantly, ask the Lord's help for others that you see. Then I become a prayer. If we are one with Him in prayer, we can do anything. Prayer changes things."

No matter her area of service Elaine was recognized for her compassion and professionalism. More than that both clients and colleagues sensed a sincere interest in them. She became a Master Teacher in primary education, received an Honor Award from Family Services of Los Angeles for Five Years of Outstanding Service, an award for Employee of the Year as a Chemical Dependency Counselor and a plaque for year for volunteering at A Place Called Home. At St. Vincent's parish she had a way of meeting parishioners in a friendly welcoming way which in several instances evolved into deeper relationships of support and guidance.

How well Elaine believed and lived this saying. "The only way to do great work is to love what you do." Rest well and joyously. Remember us as we remember you.

~ Sister Sean Patrice, Smythe, CSJ