



Remembering

Sister Joyce Marie Gaspardo, csj

July 9, 1936 ~ April 10, 2020

Sister Joyce was born in the family farmhouse in Cornell, Illinois, and baptized Joyce Evelyn. She was the youngest of four girls, joining Marjorie, Delores, and Lois. Her father, John Baptist Gaspardo, and her mother, Mary Jane Grieser, owned a 310-acre farm where the four girls grew up. Joyce wrote a colorful picture of life on the farm. "Dad worked long hard hours...caring for animals, raising crops to feed them, and selling any excess to support us....Mom raised a big garden, made apple butter over an open outdoor fire in a big black copper kettle every fall, canned fruit and vegetables for our winter food, and kept our lovely farmhouse.

"Helping Dad outside was a favorite thing for me to do. I learned to drive the tractor about age eight or ten, and taught Lois how to drive the car....I was active in 4-H and had a reserve champion Holstein heifer one year, raising her from a calf. I had a pet dog named Buggzy who waited at the end of the lane all day for me to come home from school. Playing in the timber and riding my bike were favorite pastimes in summer and fall; sledding and playing fox and geese in the snow were fun in winter."

Joyce received her diploma from Cornell Elementary School, a little one-room schoolhouse, and went on to the local high school. But at the end of her sophomore year, her parents took her to Tucson, Arizona, on the advice of a doctor who said that a drier climate might help her sinus condition that threatened to go into asthma or chronic bronchitis.

She chose to enroll in Salpointe High School and there met the Sisters of St. Joseph for the first time. "Sister Catherine Joseph Benton was a wonderful support to me as I adjusted from a small country school to a new pioneering Catholic city school far away from home. She asked me one day if I had ever thought of being a sister. The same week I was attending a church mission in which I had been asking myself if I thought I could be a sister, since I was impressed with the joy and dedicated service I saw in the sisters. Being active in the service club and going to daily Mass also helped me consider a religious vocation. Since my health had improved and I knew the sisters here in the west, I decided to enter out here."

Joyce entered the community at St. Mary's Academy on Slauson and Crenshaw on September 15, 1954, and received the habit on March 19, 1955 with the name of Sister Marie John. Six months later, the novitiate made the move to its new home, the House of Studies in Brentwood, just below the campus of Mount St. Mary's College. First vows on March 19, 1957 were located in the chapel of the college. Final profession was on August 6, 1962 in the newly completed chapel at the House of Studies. She received a B.A. degree in Social Sciences and an elementary teaching credential from Mount St. Mary's College. In 1968 as a result of Vatican II changes, she changed her religious name to Sister Joyce Marie.

Sr. Joyce's first 18 years of ministry were spent in elementary schools, the first eight years in Arizona at St. Ambrose, and St. Joseph, Tucson, and Sacred Heart in Prescott. After a year at St. Anthony in Fresno and a year at St. Vincent in Los Angeles, she went to Christ the King in Pleasant Hill as principal and superior. After two years teaching junior high at St. Cyril, Sr. Joyce's ministry took a turn.

When asked by the community if she would like to go into formation, she felt she needed to study before she would know how to answer that question. "I chose the Institute for Religious Formation at St. Louis University. It was a ten-month certificate program with special emphasis on spiritual and retreat direction training. It included a 30-day retreat in Manresa, Spain, where Ignatius wrote the Exercises."

When she returned to the province in 1976, Sister Joyce worked in campus ministry at Mount St. Mary's doing spiritual direction, retreats, and involving the students in volunteer work. From 1980-1986, she served as provincial councilor/regional superior for San Diego and then as province vocation director for six years at the Villa Maria House of Prayer in La Habra.

Joyce was always active in community leadership, participating in province assemblies and chapters. She was a general chapter delegate three times. She served on the province leadership selection committee three times, once as chairperson. Among other board memberships, she served on the board of St. Joseph's Center. Volunteering seemed her middle name. She particularly enjoyed being Eucharistic minister and serving the sick.

In 1992, Sister Joyce became provincial superior of the Los Angeles Province. Beginning this year, provincials were appointed with two assistants with the expectation that the three would function as a team. Joyce, with her assistants Sister Cecelia Louise Moore and Sister Maureen O'Connor, took on the task of developing the model for team leadership. Since regional superiors no longer had the additional role of provincial councilor, the colloquium was initiated to enable communication and decision-making.

For seventeen years following her time as provincial, Joyce served as pastoral associate at St. Clement Parish in Santa Monica. She also developed an extensive spiritual direction practice that touched the lives of many. Joyce developed a passion for and profound practice of Centering Prayer. This began before she went to the House of Prayer, but certainly was deepened there. It became her life's prayer practice; she was a teacher and guide for others.

As she began to slow down, she continued to enjoy her many friends and the beauty of her world around her. She visited her family at least once a year, staying in the old home on the farm now a big enterprise run by the next generation of Gaspardos. She happily became a part of the families of her friends. Sr. Pat Nelson's family in Tucson considered her one of theirs. Sr. Kathy Stein's mother adopted Joyce and included her on an Alaska cruise. Later, Joyce helped celebrate Mrs. Stein's 100th birthday. Sr. Anne Luis's family welcomed Joyce into their hearts and homes. Regular trips to the Pacific Northwest deepened her long relationship with the Williams family, introduced new friends, and gave her the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the Northwest. A particular pleasure was the yearly vacation at the family cabin at Priest Lake.

Joyce had a gift for friendship, sharing stories, laughter, good memories, and beautiful times for prayer with friends old and new. She had a quiet presence, a way of listening completely, then giving a calm, deep, loving response. Her presence in a group brought laughter and depth. "My religious life," she wrote, "has truly been a fulfilling, nurturing experience of God's and my sisters' abundant love for me."

In the last months of her life, her health began to break down, to the degree that her friends began to talk about hospice care at home. But Joyce and her loving God had other plans. She died quietly in St. John's Hospital on Good Friday morning, April 10.

May her dear soul rest in peace

~ Written by Sister Mary Williams, CSJ