



Sister Estelle Marie Kroger

May 7, 1936 - March 4, 2021

Marjorie Ann was born in Mexico City, Mexico. Both her parents, Bernard Joseph Kroger and Margaret Pauline Hufnagel, were born on the East Coast. Her sister, Mary Ellen Susanna (Sue), was born two years after Estelle. Adventure invited itself into their lives early on, and was always a part of Estelle's life. "Right before I turned 13 we moved from Mexico to Santa Barbara. I attended San Rogue Elementary School in Santa Barbara, graduating in 1951. In 1955 I graduated from Garcia Diego Catholic High School. I had been thinking about being a Sister."

During her sophomore year in high school, with the BVM Sisters, she went to her Associate Pastor to ask about entering the Franciscan Sisters. She had met the Franciscan Sisters in grammar school. He suggested she stay in California since it was growing and needed sisters. She wrote a form letter, mailed it out, and waited for the incoming brochures. In the end she chose the Carondelet Sisters, saying she liked our simple, beautiful habit.

Estelle entered religious life on September 15, 1955, in Los Angeles, received the habit and religious name of Sister Estelle Marie on March 19, 1956. Final vows followed on August 6, 1963. Her 60th Jubilee was in 2016.

At one time Estelle said, "I was in the first reception to enter at Carondelet Center in 1955. I was also in the beginning of the Juniorate program, and in the

second community to live at #8 Doheny. After Vatican II, I took advantage of attending enrichment opportunities every summer. I was hungry for anything on spirituality, and was thrilled at my growing relationship with God. A life-changing event for me was a 30 day retreat in 1977.”

Estelle’s ability to speak Spanish was helpful in many settings. She ministered as a Catholic school teacher for 18 years. She was the Director of Religious Education in two bilingual parishes, Oxnard and Carpinteria, where she was a Master Catechist teacher in both languages. Then she began her ministry in the Public School system serving as an English Second Language tutor, as a bilingual teacher, as an after-school tutor for “at risk fifth grade students,” a classroom aide, and then ESL teacher.

Estelle completed four units of CPE and greatly enjoyed hospital ministry. She ministered as a Chaplain at Santa Marta Hospital in East LA, and later at St. Camillus Center for Pastoral Care, also in East LA. Estelle certainly had a heart for the poor, sick and overlooked. “I loved the one-on-one with patients; these interactions were ‘eucharist’ for me. After eight years, though, my heart was weary from the intense relationships I had formed and I needed a break.”

Having heard about the Angel Interfaith Network, founded to respond to emergency needs of the County Hospital patients, she went to their office and liked what she saw. “I was hired on the spot! Rev. Don Smith, my boss, valued my chaplaincy experience and my being bilingual. It was a good change of pace and I made many good friends.” After four years there, Rev. Smith said, “Her bilingual abilities and patience for computer data entry problems have proven to be valuable assets for us.”

Estelle possessed considerable gifts and energy. She was a prayerful woman who listened well and inspired confidence. While compassionate, she was also objective, gentle, and accepting of all she met. She especially liked a quotation by Joseph Girzone, “Jesus was always peaceful and tranquil because his heart was empty to be filled with a loving relationship with his Abba.” She said, “Every day I ask for love to enter my heart.”

Estelle's availability to the needs she observed was her legacy to us. A year after knee replacement surgery, she saw a need in her local community at Villa Carondelet. Estelle offered to serve as assistant to the administrator two days a week in order to give the administrator time off. This was a big responsibility. It involved knowledge and availability for the numerous events and crisis of the day. This was yet another role she filled in her life of service.

In 2015 she joined the Holy Family Community at Carondelet Center, after suffering a herniated disk in her back. The years of slowing down provided her with lessons in letting go, and brought many gifts and blessings in a growing relationship with God. Throughout her life Sister Estelle took a passionate seeking for God and kept it alive through prayer and good works.

Her sudden departure was a shock. But we rejoice she is now with the God she so ardently sought. May her desire to have a heart filled with love, her hunger for a deeper spirituality and her quiet availability serve as reminders to us as we journey with the Risen Christ as our companion. Like Estelle, may our lives be guided by unifying love.

We thank our gracious God for Estelle's fidelity to the many invitations offered to her from her Beloved.

"Prayer is the response to the One whose heart beats with ours."

~ Written by Sister Frances Baker, CSJ