



Sister Joanna Bramble, CSJ

February 21, 1938 - September 3, 2023

We come together to celebrate the life well lived of Joanna Marie Bramble, who went to her loving God on September 3, 2023.

She and her twin sister Jeanne were born on February 21, 1938 to Glenn and Marian Bramble. Joanna referred to her twin as “an essential part of who I am.” In 1952 her adopted brother Donald, age three, joined the happy family.

Of her Mother Joanna says, “She taught us love of good literature by reading to us very night. Joanna’s favorite verse from Winnie the Pooh went like this: ‘It isn’t much fun for One, but Two, can stick together”, says Pooh, says he. “That’s how it is” says Pooh.

Of her Father Joanna says, “He helped us with math homework insisting that we not only get the right answer, but also know why it was right. He loved fishing and swimming at Catalina, and we went there each summer on the Nanina, the boat he and our Uncle Keith built in our back yard.”

Of both her parents she says, “They lived their passion for justice, especially by working for racial justice, and taught us to do the same.

After graduating from Bishop Conaty High School, Joanna’s plans to attend Seattle University shifted to entering the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Los Angeles Province. She would always chuckle at remembering her six-year-old brother’s reaction, “Well, that’s the end of Joanna.”

For Joanna, that day in 1956 was instead the start of a very full, rewarding, and diverse life.

She began her CSJ career as a teacher of Religion and Social Studies. She would take her classes into the inner city of Oakland. Soon after teaching she learned community organizing and says, "It changed my life." She remembers, I sat in people's homes and drank out of cracked cups or kept standing because there is no place to sit. I asked them what their concerns were for our neighborhood and invited them to join our neighborhood improvement group." Joanna joined with Religious Witness for Homeless People in demonstrations even surrendering to arrest on their behalf.

Her accomplishments include helping residents buy their own homes from Southern Pacific Railroad; getting garbage trucks to come into the area; and getting the city of Oakland to install curbs and gutters in the neighborhood. Together with her dear friend Sister. Pat Sears, she founded a self-help housing organization for the poor named *Jubilee West*. Joanna remembers, "After 11 years of complex problems, joy, tears, and hope, we have eighty-five units of renovated housing, all affordable to low-income families".

After a year's sabbatical of wandering in Switzerland, silent days at the Redwoods Monastery, study at Genesis Farm and study with Joanna Macy, Joanna united her "activist self with her contemplative self." She provided retreats based on all she had learned from her experiences of the inter-relatedness of pain and beauty, gratitude, and grief. Anyone who has been fortunate enough to attend either of Joanna's retreat offerings, "Opening the Global Heart or Everything is Sacred" has learned to pray within the context of billions of years of creation, while coming to understand the connection between the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth.

In addition to providing retreats, Joanna hosted a yearly Winter Solstice ritual for family and friends to invite the creative energies of darkness turn towards the light.

Of her six years spent on the Provincial Council, Joanna says, "I loved serving our dear community. I especially appreciated the friendships I formed at that time.

Following her time in Provincial leadership, Joanna served as Development director at St. Mary's Center. She says, "We serve homeless seniors, most of whom are mentally ill and addicted to drugs and alcohol. With our help, most of them can find income, housing, and health care."

When asked what are you most grateful for? Joanna responded, "the richness of my life, the interwoven strands of joy, pain, humor, grief, beauty, ministry, community, loneliness, love, commitment and for my deepening awareness of God in me and in all that is."

Joanna's life puts us in touch with the numinous mystery of God. These are the words she uses to describe this Great Mystery, "It is openness to the unfathomable presence, power, energy, connectedness in the Universe, in me, in other people, and in all situations, which I call God. It is sitting with open hands and open heart in deep silence and solitude, or dancing with

abandonment to powerful music, or walking on the beach feeling the immensity of the ocean, or remembering my 1,500-year-old redwood tree. It is anything that brings home to me the sacredness of all beings. It is coming to a slow realization of the holiness of each day of my life.”

With great gratitude for each day of Joanna’s blessed life we now celebrate her eternal life as promised through Jesus Christ.

Joanna, we keep your precious light burning in our memories. May you rest now in God’s peace.

~ Sisters Annette Debs, CSJ and Donna Gibbs, CSJ