



Sister Katherine (Sean Maureen) Kenny, OP
(1939 – 2014)

Katherine Patricia Kenny was born in Detroit on April 9, 1939, to Peter and Viola (Gustafson) Kenny. She was the first of their seven children, all of whom were born prematurely. Only Katherine and her brother, Jim, survived; the other children died soon after birth.

Her mother was Lutheran but converted to Catholicism when she married. Because they had lost five newborns, their parents, especially their father, were very protective of Kathy and Jim.

Kathy's first contact with Adrian Dominican Sisters was at Our Lady of Sorrows in Farmington, Michigan, where she and her brother attended grade school. After graduating from Ladywood High School in 1957, she entered the postulate in Adrian. Her mother was delighted with her decision but her father was not pleased. He eventually supported her decision when he knew she would be safe.

Sister Kathy received the habit on December 27, 1957, and was given the name, Sister Sean Maureen. The following year she made first profession.

From 1959 to 1971, Sister Kathy was assigned to teach in the following schools: St. Lawrence in Utica, Michigan, for three years; St. Joseph in Port Huron, Michigan, for three years; St. Joseph in Bronxville, New York, for one year; St. Paul in Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan, for three years; and Hoban Dominican High School in Cleveland, Ohio, for two years. During those summers, Sister Kathy continued her studies at Siena Heights College (now University) and in 1968 received a bachelor's degree in fine arts.

From 1971 to 1975, Sister Kathy ministered at two Detroit parishes: St. Martin Church as pastoral minister for three years, and one year at St. Suzanne Church, where she coordinated the religious education program.

For the next two years, Sister Kathy studied at Barry College (now University) Graduate School of Social Work and, in 1977, received a Master's Degree in Social Work Program Planning. This marked the beginning of a major shift in her ministry focus for the next twenty-nine years.

Her first position was at the Archdiocese of Detroit, where Sister Kathy served as a social service specialist from August 1977 to January 1980. Her responsibilities included interviewing new applicants for social services, ensuring care was being provided, and following up on cases of existing clients.

In February 1980, she accepted the position of Executive Director of Catholic Social Services in Macomb County, Michigan. This agency provided a broad range of services, including child and adolescent evaluations and treatment; adult psychological testing; psychiatric interventions; substance abuse screening and treatment alternatives to domestic aggression program; and psycho-education group programming. Sister Kathy served as Executive Director for ten years.

In April 1990, Sister Kathy became President and CEO of Catholic Services of Macomb County. During the five years of her presidency, she was responsible to the agency's board for all programming, buildings, finances, staff and budget. As president, she also had opportunities to develop new programs in collaboration with other organizations to address social service issues in the county. She helped develop the Agency's working partnership with Mercy Hospital in Macomb that encouraged a collaborative sharing of skills, contacts, and information when responding to the human needs of the county.

In addition to agency responsibilities, Sister Kathy accepted Senator Carl Levin's invitation to serve on a thirty-eight member Citizens Merit Selection Commission responsible for screening candidates for federal judge positions in the Southeast District of Michigan. She also chaired the Macomb County Economic Opportunity Board.

In April 1995, Sister Kathy received the prestigious Thea Bowman Award from the Archdiocese of Detroit for her fifteen years of community service and leadership at Catholic Services of Macomb County.

In her Annals for that year, Sister Kathy wrote, "I left a position I had held for 15 years in Michigan to come to Barry University in Miami, Florida, in July. During this time two important people in my life died of cancer: Sister Mimi Lynch from my crowd and a friend from the time we entered, and my only brother, Jim."

Sister Kathy worked at Barry University as a career outreach coordinator from August 1995 to February 1997. This was a transition time for Sister Kathy, and from her Annals we get a glimpse of what she was experiencing. She wrote, "My aim this year was to balance my life so I have joined a centering prayer group." The following year she wrote in her Annals, "As I return to Michigan after two years in Florida, the importance of having family, close friends, and professional networks near has become very clear. The two years away from Michigan has been an opportunity, a time away to reflect on my values."

Beginning in December 1997, Sister Kathy ministered as a psychotherapist at Westland Counseling Center in Westland, Michigan. As a therapist in a community mental health facility, she provided service to the poor minority men and women who had chronic mental illness. In 2000-2001 the facility had an insufficient number of psychiatrists because of budget cuts, and it was a challenge to keep clients stable. As a result, Sister Kathy resigned her salaried position at the Center so she meet with mental health patients on an outpatient basis. She noted in her Annals, "I am now able to see a variety of patients with a flexible schedule."

During the last four years of active ministry Sister Kathy continued to minister as an outpatient therapist at Community Care Services in Lincoln Park and the Livonia Counseling Center in Livonia, Michigan. She noted in her 2004 Annals that this was the first year she was not working with a full case load of chronically mentally ill clients. She had more time to handle "a number of cases which involved marriage counseling, often the husband is using the roles of his father and grandfather in which they control the wife."

In September 2006, Sister Katherine Kenney returned to Adrian and lived at the Dominican Life Center/Maria until her death on October 12, 2014, at the age of seventy-five.

A fitting summary of Kathy's remarkable life of ministry was given by Sister Maria Goretti Browne, Vicareess of Holy Rosary Chapter, at the wake/remembrance service on October 14, 2014. She said:

Kathy was good at what she did – ministering to those in need. She had a bubbly personality and easily drew others to herself. In her ministry as a social worker, she focused on abused children. Her love, though, was being with youngsters of high school age. We know that is a gift, one that many of us do not have. She was an active and creative person, never one to sit and be complacent. She was able to organize -- or mobilize-- into action. Kathy was fun and generous with her time.

We lost that Kathy many years ago. In her last years, she allowed us to minister to her, and to give back to her just a little of the love that she had poured out on so many, and Kathy, for that we are grateful. May your heaven be full of fun, and the love and peace that you brought to all of us. May you rest in peace. Amen.”

In her homily Sister Joella Miller compared the spiritual life to a seed that is germinating. She said:

What a wonderful image this is of the spiritual life! Like a patient farmer, God is always planting seeds in our hearts, waiting for them to “die” so that they can bear fruit. Kathy was only one, solitary person, one small grain of wheat. But she touched many lives, she rose above any fear she might have and ministered to unmarried pregnant girls, abused children, those in prison and any child in need of help. Kathy made a difference in the lives of those she met. Kathy loved her family and ministered to them in whatever their need was; they were always in her prayers.

Thank you Kathy for sharing your life with us, for allowing many seeds to sprout into fruit you so generously used to touch the lives of others that you could never have imagined.

Father. Jim Hug, SJ, offered this opening prayer at Kathy's funeral liturgy

*Our Loving God, Father/Mother of all creation,
loving foundation of all families, of all loving relationships,
all tender and sensitive concern,
We have come together today from far and near
to celebrate our sister, Kathy
to thank you for the wonderful gift of her time with us,
a time of loving attentiveness and wise humor,
a time of prayer, dedicated education and Gospel proclamation,
a time of grace and service
a time of letting go of all she treasured into Your hands.*

*Let the shape and loving care of our lives join with hers
in compassionate service and sensitive commitment to the needy
in joy, laughter and a fun-loving spirit,
in courage to try the untried and
in commitment to You, the saving Mystery of our lives.*

*We make our prayer in the name of Jesus and the communion of your Spirit where we all are one
with You and Kathy, now and forever. Amen.*