Sister Maureen Driscoll, OP
1933 – 2015

When all is said and done from first to last education has always been my line.¹

Sister Maureen Driscoll was born in 1933 in Port Angeles, Washington, between the hours of midnight (July 10) and 1:00 a.m. (July 11). Her parents, John and Martha (Moore) Driscoll, had the option of choosing which day to put on her birth certificate and they chose July 10 because it was the Feast of the Seven Servite Founders. According to Sister Maureen, her father thought having seven saints on your birthday was better than having only the one listed for the next day.

Of her childhood, Sister Maureen wrote:

> Although I was an only child I grew up in a neighborhood filled with children who played games, roller skated and bicycled around the local streets, discovered the first trillium in the woods [and] gathered wild strawberries.

> I attended Queen of Angels Catholic School for kindergarten through the ninth grade. I came to Holy Angels High School as a boarder for the final three years of high school. I met a variety of sisters who always impressed me with their joyfulness and concern for students. My decision to enter was based on my admiration of the spirit and gentleness of the Dominican Sisters I had witnessed through those three years.

Sister Maureen entered on September 7, 1951, when the Edmond Dominican Motherhouse was still located in Everett, Washington. At her reception, she received her religious name, Sister Mary David, and the following year she made first profession.

After one year of study at Alverno College in Milwaukee, Sister Maureen was assigned to teach junior high students in three parish schools in Washington from 1954 to 1961: Our Lady Star of the Sea in Bremerton, St. Alphonsus in Seattle and Our Lady of Good Help School in Hoquiam. Beginning in 1961 she taught in Our Lady of Perpetual Help High School in Everett for three years. In 1964, she returned to St. Alphonsus in Seattle where she served as school principal for five years.

Her summers were spent at the University of Washington in preparation for beginning her doctoral studies in 1969. About one her professors, who was considered the undisputed poet laureate of the Northwest, she wrote, “Among my greatest delights were opportunities to take several poetry classes with the remarkable Nelson Bentley.”

¹ John Henry Cardinal Newman
She had begun work on her doctoral thesis and was teaching at the University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB) when she was elected President of the Edmond Dominicans by the General Chapter in 1978. She had hoped to continue her studies after her four-year term but she was re-elected to a second term in 1982.

In her homily on December 2 in St. Catherine Chapel in Adrian, Sister Karen Rossman said the following about Maureen’s eight years of leadership.

Maureen had a prophetic heart. Maureen said, “A prophet is not so much one who sees into the future as one who sees clearly in the present; not so much a person of foresight as of insight.” As our Prioress, Maureen held and processed our feelings of trauma as we divested of our two hospitals. She reinforced our shared insight into what was needed and why we chose that path. She brought our constitutions to Rome and celebrated with us when the final copies were accepted. Surely, there were still questions about our future but Maureen remembered for us [the] words from Mary Oliver: “Though I play at the edges of knowing, truly I know our part is not knowing but looking, and touching, and loving.” And truly Maureen looked, touched, and loved each of us as our life in common deepened and widened under her leadership.

At the end of her second term, Sister Maureen studied at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California, before returning to her ministry at UCSB. She worked primarily with diverse, low-income groups of students, often those who were the first in their family to go to college. She designed courses for students pursuing health careers, and created a research course that involved community service learning. Sister Maureen continued to teach at UCSB until she retired in 2004.

In 2014, UCSB established a Maureen Driscoll Award that gives a $1,000 scholarship annually to students in the Academic Communities for Excellence (ACE) courses. One of her colleagues in the program said this about Maureen.

Maureen selflessly handed me all of her teaching materials for the course. One of the main things I think about when I teach these students is how passionately Maureen felt about them. She was tireless in her advocacy for these students. She wrote over 60 letters of recommendation a year.

In 2008, Sister Maureen Driscoll became a resident of St. Joseph Residence in Seattle, where she died on November 16, 2015, at the age of eighty-two and in the sixty-third year of her religious profession. A Mass of Christian Resurrection was celebrated at St Joseph Residence-Chapel in Seattle on November 24. The burial was in Calvary Cemetery in Seattle.

Sister Lorene Heck, Chapter Prioress of the Dominican West Mission Chapter welcomed all to the celebration of Sister Maureen’s life. She thanked Father John Foster, SJ, a long-time friend of Sister Maureen, who was the celebrant. She also thanked Sister Jacqueline Fernandez, the Providence Sisters and staff of St. Joseph Residence for their loving care of Maureen during the past eight years.
After giving a summary of Sister Maureen’s life in ministry, Lorene closed with these words of Sister Maureen:

   Memory is an antidote to hopelessness, to a lack of imagination, to a perspective that states that there is nothing new to hope for, nothing new to speak about, nothing new to dream about. But celebrations like today’s remind us of the prophetic power of memory and of God’s caring, comforting, compelling and challenging presence in our individual and community lives.

On December 2, a liturgy celebrating Maureen’s life and ministry was held in St. Catherine Chapel in Adrian, Michigan. The celebrant was Fr. Jim Hug, SJ. In her homily, Sister Karen Rossman reflected on the readings for the liturgy and said,

Sister Joan Unger (Sister Maureen’s close friend of 60+ years) selected our readings today. I don’t know what conversations took place between Maureen and Joan but after praying with this gospel I believe that Maureen likely prayed with it many times. In what one scholar called “words of poetic music,” this Prologue to John’s gospel tells of a God who lives both in a timeless, primal moment “In the beginning,” and also within the believing human family. “And the Word became flesh.” The depth of this mystery of a transcendent God – intrinsically and indescribably creative, yet immanent and intensely relational – would have captivated Maureen’s heart.

John’s gospel is a dramatic narrative blending stories with the belief and self-understanding of the Johannine community. Scripture Scholars tell us that the Prologue to John’s Gospel echoes throughout the entire gospel text. It is “a road map which often sheds clarifying light.” The Johannine message is that Jesus of Nazareth is God’s self-revelation and the focus in the gospel journey is to become Children of this God who is both in the beginning and now among us. This power to become God’s children is given to those who do justice and who love one another.

Maureen was a child of God, a blessing within the human family. She volunteered as a lay counselor at the Open Door Clinic, a center for street people and students. She worked with college students who were low income and first-generation students in their families. The University of California at Santa Barbara established the academic Maureen Driscoll Award which is now given to first generation and low-income college students. They proclaimed that Sister Maureen was willing to take a risk, to listen and learn, and able to help others. She was tireless in her advocacy.

During the Remembrance Service that afternoon following the liturgy, Sister Nadine Foley read the following message that she sent to Sister Lorene Heck, Chapter Prioress, and the Sisters of the Dominican West Mission Chapter.

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2 Ruth 1:16b-17, 2Timothy 4:7-8, John 1:1-14
Word of the death of Sister Maureen Driscoll has touched the hearts of many these days and in a unique way it has touched mine. I was privileged to know her as sister and friend and as a special joy in my life. I knew her as an exceptionally brilliant woman with an engaging wit but above all, a woman of faith.

When the Congregation celebrated its ninetieth birthday Sister Maureen described what it means to be a disciple. Recalling Jesus’s sending his disciples she reminded the sisters that “the presence of God comes only after there has first been present the presence, the visit, of a disciple.” And how are the disciples to be present? Through curing, feeding, teaching, confronting, visiting.

But whatever we do, there is a point at which we must let go. “Friends must see other friends go from them in death,” she says. And that is the reality we deal with in these days.

The Most Reverend J. Peter Sartain, Archbishop of Seattle, sent this message:

I am sorry to hear of the death of Sister Maureen Driscoll, OP, and I wanted to drop you a brief note of prayers and condolences as you grieve her loss. I am sure her death brings a time of sadness to your entire community.

Please know that I will keep all of you in my prayers, asking the Lord to give you his peace, which surpasses all understanding. May she rest in eternal peace.

The remembrance service concluded with Sisters Karen Rossman, Mina Riggs, Mary White, Marian O'Loughlin, and Dorothy Berg sharing their memories about Sister Maureen. Included were stories about boarding school days at Holy Angels Academy in Seattle.
Center: With Sister Elizabeth Conrad, Right: With her parents, 1957.

Left: Sister Maureen with Sister Barbara Matteson, Right: Sister Maureen Driscoll (front row, far left) with, from left: Sisters Michele Kopp, Francine Barber, and Judy Byron; and back row, from left: Sisters Patrice Eilers, Claudia Morgan, and Rosaire McAuliffe.

Left: Graduation, 1951