Sister Mary Catherine Evans, OP
(1937-2015)

I committed my life to Catholic Education
to focus on making a difference in the lives of children.

Mary Catherine Evans, known to her friends as Mary Kay, was also known as Sister Edward Catherine. She was born on July 23, 1937, in Columbus, Ohio, the second of five children born to Charles and Gertrude (McBride) Evans. Both parents were born in Ohio: Gertrude in Logan and Charles in Nelsonville.

In the family biography their mother is described as...

*a social person who was very determined to be a good mother and was very active in her children’s [education]. She was a volunteer, did some substitute teaching, which was only reading to the students, and was a member of the PTA. She helped us with homework and made sure that we got things done.*

Around the time of their marriage in 1933, their father got a job with a bakery in Versailles, Indiana. Their father is described as:

*...working a lot of hours so [he] was not home much at the least when we were awake. He took a lot of personal responsibility for the bakery. He even drove the company truck if there was no one to drive and products had to get to the store. He worked late hours, six days a week. We were asleep when he came home and he was asleep when we went to school.*

Sister Mary Kay’s father was soon sent to Omaha, Nebraska, to attend an in-service program for employees after which he received promotions that increased his salary and his responsibilities. Because of these promotions and transfers, the family moved several times. Sister Mary Kay attended several schools: St. Leo in Columbus, Ohio; Blessed Sacrament and Holy Name in Omaha, Nebraska; St. Mary and Bishop Muldoon High School in Rockford, Illinois.

Sister Mary Kay’s first contact with Adrian Dominicans was at Muldoon High School. In her biography she wrote:

*The Adrian Dominican Sisters and teachers at Bishop Muldoon High School were wonderful models for me during my four years there. Much to the surprise of many friends and relatives...upon graduation in 1955, I chose to enter the Congregation on June 25, 1955, with three other candidates from Muldoon. Being my first time away from home, I was rather nervous, but adjusted quickly. Talk about “awe” moments.*

That fall, as a postulant, Sister Mary Kay was assigned to take the place temporarily of a Sister who taught at St. Suzanne School in Detroit because she needed time off to receive medical
attention. Sister Mary Kay was chosen because as a high school student she taught religious education at one of the parishes. What initially was to be temporary replacement turned out to be for the school year. In her biography, Sister Mary Kay described her first teaching experience for the Congregation:

*St. Suzanne School had four [class] rooms for grades one to eight. This was the beginning of my ministry in education...and I loved it. Having completed the year as a first grade teacher at St. Suzanne, I always have been indebted to the sisters for their patience in providing an example that laid the foundation of my love for elementary education.*

Following first profession on August 5, 1959, Sister Mary Kay was assigned to teach second grade for the next sixteen years in the following parish schools in Illinois: St. Patrick in Joliet, five years; St. Philip Neri in Chicago, seven years; St. Albert the Great in Burbank, four years.

Her summers during these years were spent studying at Siena Heights College (University), where she received her bachelor’s degree in 1963 and at De Paul University in Chicago where she received her master’s degree in 1972.

In 1973, Sister Mary Kay received her first assignment as principal of an elementary school. According to her ministry report for 1973-1974, Saints Cyril and Methodius was a small Slovak parish school with a total enrollment of one hundred forty students and a faculty/staff of twenty-seven – twenty-one of whom were part-time. Sister Mary Kay provided the following details about the school and its future.

*Due to the transition taking place in this older section of [Joliet], younger families are moving to new areas in the suburbs; Blacks and Hispanics are moving into the area and school registration is open to all.*

*After much deliberation, planning and opposition, the school will reorganize its present structure of education and consolidate with a neighboring school. SS Cyril & Methodius will provide education for students in grades one through five; St. Bernard will serve as a junior high [school]. The process of consolidation is a difficult one that creates a stirring of emotions and apprehensions.*

*I am the only Adrian Dominican associated with the school. This experience has been one of benefit to me as I feel I have a greater appreciation for the education we have been provided continuously through the years.*

She continued to serve as principal of the newly consolidated schools of St. Bernard and Saints Cyril and Methodius for the next four school years.

By 1978, Sister Mary Kay’s ability to administer the consolidated schools was known to the Diocese of Joliet and she was offered the position of Curriculum Director for the diocese. She served three years as the diocesan director of curriculum, and then became principal for six
years in one of the parish schools in the Diocese of Joliet: St. Matthew in Glendale Heights, Illinois.

In 1987, Sister Mary Kay received a call from her friend, Father George Luzinski, pastor of St. Phillip Parish in Fullerton, California, and brother of Sister Georgina Luzinski. He asked Sister Mary Kay to be principal of their parish school. This began her seventeen years of ministry in California.

She was principal at St. Phillip School for four years and then served the Diocese of Orange for the next eight years as Associate Superintendent. In 1999, Sister Mary Kay accepted the position of Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Monterey. In addition to site visits to schools in the northern and central areas of the diocese, she also was responsible for overseeing the accreditation, testing, and curriculum of the Western Catholic Education Association and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

In the January 2000 edition of the diocesan newspaper, The Observer, Sister Mary Kay wrote an article about Catholic schools lighting the way in a new century. Here is an excerpt:

Today’s students are the leaders of the new century. Their education is the foundation for our future. As Catholic school educators, we have the unique opportunity to touch the future; to “Light the Way.” Shedding light on more than just academics, a Catholic education helps instill the self-worth, respect for others, and real spirituality that tomorrow’s adults will need to face the challenges ahead.

Sister Mary Kay left Monterey in 2004 and returned to Illinois, where she served as Assistant Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Rockford for three years. Her last five years of ministry were spent in school administration for the Diocese of Joliet. She served as principal of St Charles School in Bensenville, Illinois, for two years and, from 2009 to 2012, she was assistant principal at St. Mary of Gostyn School in Downers Grove, Illinois.

Toward the end of her first year at St. Mary, her younger sister Joanne, who entered the Congregation in 1956 and was known as Sister Charles Catherine, died on May 18, 2010.

Mary Kay retired in 2012 and two years later returned to Adrian. She died of cancer on May 19, 2015, at the age of seventy-seven and in the fifty-eighth year of her religious profession.

At the wake service Sister Jo Gaugier, Chapter Prior of Holy Rosary Chapter, shared the following remembrance.

Mary Kay was generous in her service and in her sharing: generosity was like bookends at both ends of her life. As a novice she even shared her slippers with a novice in need. And the year before she came to Adrian, she served on the Election Committee for the Dominican West Chapter. This year she visited and walked with Sister Gerry McNamara before her passing, and comforted others in their illnesses.
Her grand-nieces, Cecilia, Emma and Brenna, recalled special memories about their Aunt Mary Kay. They said:

*We always received birthday cards and messages for special events. She kept promises and told us stories. She was interested in what we were doing and always put others before herself. She kept promises. We love you dearly!*

The readings (Isaiah 42: 1-4; John 17: 1-11a) Mary Kay selected for her funeral liturgy provided a framework for Sister Molly Nicholson’s homily. Sister Molly began by saying:

*What does it mean to know another person? How do we know when we know this person? Each one of us remembers and celebrates the life and presence of Mary Kay. In many ways this past year has been a period of time during which Mary Kay lived her life in such a way that she too has left her parting message with us. During these months back home in Adrian, Mary Kay seemed to remind us of the presence of God as she so gently was present in:*

- renewing friendships,
- sharing books with others on her floor,
- visiting with those in the lobby or dining room each noontime,
- celebrating Eucharist each day,
- walking to the cemetery to be with Joanne and her friends...
- assisting at wakes and funerals, and
- visiting other sisters who found it difficult to leave their rooms.

*She has completed the work entrusted to her and now invites us to midwife others with the same wisdom, grace and loving presence she shared with us.*