

Sister Maureen Cahill, CSC

(Sister Marie William)

December 14, 1935–December 9, 2022

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, who read them at Sister Maureen’s funeral on December 20, 2022.

I would like to begin this morning with the beautiful description of their family that Sister Maureen’s niece Laura Rees sent to us.

“Sister Maureen was the youngest of five children and, according to all of the stories I heard over the years, she was a very adventurous farm girl who made it a mission to ‘Keep Up’ with her siblings. Three brothers and one sister and Sister Maureen made five.

“When I was born in 1953, my parents asked her to be my godmother. Despite living far away from each other, Sister made me feel that she thought of me on a daily basis. When Sister took her final vows, our whole family went to celebrate with her. Her parents felt so proud and blessed to have not just One daughter serving the Lord...but Both of their daughters were nuns.

“Sister was fierce about her sports teams and about 10 years ago, my husband’s nephew played for the fighting Irish as quarterback and is now the offensive coordinator. At first, you would have thought that she sat on the bench with the team—she was so proud.

“In the fourth grade, I wrote a little note to God, telling him about my plan to become a nun like Sister Maureen. That did not happen, but it points to the devotion I had to her and the fine example she set. She was always so cheerful when she visited us. Both of our parents were crazy for her.

“I know she is with God now and reunited with her earthly family. What a beautiful homecoming!”

Susan Cahill, Sister Maureen's oldest niece, also shared the following story: "I loved visiting Sister Maureen's childhood bedroom on the farm when my family visited. Just to the right of her bedroom as you entered was a small built-in grotto, decorated with gold leaf paint in a swirly, beautiful script. In the center of the shrine, which was dedicated to Mary, was a small ceramic bowl of holy water! I just couldn't get over how lucky Sister Maureen was to have grown up with her very own Mary shrine."

Thank you to Laura and Susan for giving us a glimpse into Sister Maureen and the Cahill family.

Sister Maureen was a poet. She came by her love of poetry honestly. Her father was also a poet, and in 1956 wrote a beautiful poem to his wife titled "To a Loving Wife and Companion" written on the occasion of their 40th wedding anniversary. Following in her father's footsteps Maureen expressed her thoughts and depth of feeling about life in her poem, "Trees."

Trees

by Sister Maureen Cahill, 1997

It seems easy to be a tree in winter,

Naked fingers reaching into the sky

Roots deep in frozen soil

Branches spread out...moving

with the wind.

Yet safe, immobile, just being.

A tree in spring...

that is something different!

It seems hard to be a tree in spring,

To bring forth life from tiny,
closed buds
To produce flowers and leaves,
Roots waking up from the cold
 twisting, turning
 Going deeper and deeper
Yes, it must be hard to be
a tree in spring.

Everyday seems like spring to me!

Yes, every day seemed like spring to Maureen. How revelatory are these words. Maureen experienced life's challenges as she strove to bring forth life, to produce the flowers of goodness and compassion as she struggled with her own growth and inner being. She recognized that sometimes it is hard to be a tree going deeper and deeper into life.

Maureen entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross in September 1955. Sister Yvonne Hatt, CSC, wrote that Maureen had shared that when she was considering her decision about coming to the community she got on her horse and rode out into the country to reflect. While Maureen was a student at Saint Mary's College [Notre Dame, Indiana], she talked about her decision with Sister Mary Agnes (Mahoney), CSC, who later wrote, "She has evidently thought out what she wanted to do and why because when I questioned her and proposed some things for her consideration, she had already thought about them." That would have been Maureen—one step ahead—having already thought things through!

Years later, after coming to Saint Mary's, Sister Maureen still felt an affinity to horses. In 2017, she went on a field trip to Reins of Life. Sister Theresa Diane Streif, CSC, remembers that Sister Maureen couldn't

stop petting one horse's nose. The horse, Joy, also enjoyed being fed treats by Sister Maureen.

We have many stories of Maureen's ministry among those in need.

Sister Mary Louise Full, CSC, wrote about Sister Maureen's ministry in Texas: "In her desire to respond to the women and children of the rural Texas Valley surrounding Raymondville, Maureen was very resourceful in reaching out to find ways to respond to the needs she encountered. The people were isolated; access to transportation was limited. Maureen determined that the best way for her to respond to their needs was to go to them. Working tirelessly to find funding, she was successful in purchasing a used RV to bring her classroom to them. She tutored women and children in English and reading and networked with them to find needed resources."

Sister Mary Louise continued, "In addition, Maureen and Sister Theresa Jane Bellner, CSC, were a tremendous support to Sister Barbara Korem's, CSC, health care ministry in Matamoros, Mexico, making weekly trips to provide supplies that supported the clinic. Maureen was a woman with an abundance of energy, a keen intellect, a huge heart and love for the poor."

Sister Mary Ann Pajakowski, CSC, told this story—one she heard from Sister Maureen—when Maureen was ministering at St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Niles, Michigan: "Two cars of migrant worker families stopped at the church in Niles. They ran out of money and had one more travel day to get to the farms they were working that summer. They needed food, gas and had children with them. Maureen went to the pastor who said he was unable to assist them. Maureen was not happy with that. When the pastor left the office, Maureen directed the cars to the gas pump that the parish had on the premises and filled up the tanks. She then took them to the gym locker rooms where they took showers. I believe they slept in the gym that night, after Maureen ordered food in—I think pizzas. The next morning

she bought them breakfast and they were on their way. All of this was charged to the parish, and Maureen informed the pastor of that the next day. Maureen was fierce in serving these families. She stayed with them and made sure they had what they needed. Maureen would not have been able to turn them away.”

In this incident we see Maureen’s generous nature. Sister Dolores Jean Bray, CSC, also wrote that “Maureen was one of a kind! I will always be grateful to her for giving me her Panasonic camera when she was here in Ventura. I had many good years of taking memorable pictures with it.”

Sister Mary Ann Uebbing, CSC, mentioned that in addition to Maureen’s compassion and tenderheartedness, “She also had a great zeal for innovative education.” Sister Alice Clare Hosty, CSC, who ministered with Sister Maureen at St. Mary’s School, Niles, also stressed that Maureen was an excellent administrator—very talented and competent.

Sister Eileen Dewsnap, CSC, shared that when Sister Maureen moved to Saint Catherine by the Sea, Ventura, California, she wanted to be involved in ministry. She took on a position as caregiver to a woman in nearby Simi Valley who needed a high level of care. She continued this ministry for seven years.

Sister Margaret Ann Shield, CSC, remembers Sister Maureen as always helpful and ready when she was needed. She wrote, “She took me many times to visit my sister before she died and to visit my niece who was incapacitated. Both rides were long, but she always seemed pleased to be asked. Exceptionally kind and generous, Maureen helped me prepare the handout of pictures and sayings when my sister died.”

When Sister Jeanne Clennon, CSC, arrived at Saint Catherine’s, she and Sister Maureen were happy to see each other since they had enjoyed a friendship for many years. Sister Jeanne wrote, “At meals one of her favorite topics was describing the many exploits of

her community life. There were many because she had such a strong personality. This presented a challenge, especially to superiors. Her shadow side was counter-balanced by her well-known generosity, her tender-heartedness, her intelligence, and her sense of humor. I used to tell her that she was like the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead. ‘When she was good, she was very, very good, but when was bad she was horrid.’”

Sister Jeanne’s comments confirm our understanding of the challenges Maureen faced in life. Her passionate nature came at life with force, strength and vibrant energy. So, as we see her life come full circle we find a complex woman of faith, charged with a sense of responsibility, who never stopped responding to life’s challenges with a fierce love for God and neighbor.

On a lighter note, Sister Maureen Grady, CSC, shared her one stand-out memory of Sisters Maureen and Marcelle (Frizzie) [who died the day after Sister Maureen]: Their “battle” in Augusta dining room. “Surely God has a sense of humor whereby the tedious duel in the dining room became the blessed dual in the cemetery.” To explain, Sisters Maureen and Marcelle will be buried in the same plot here on Earth, and are now joined together again in their heavenly home.

Sister Ellen Mary (Taylor), CSC, shared the following poem, which Maureen wrote to celebrate their band’s Golden Jubilee. She composed the poem while the group was at our Lakeside house. The band had gathered to be together and share their individual journeys to 50 years of profession. The title of the poem refers to the name of the band.

Queenship of Mary

by Sister Maureen Cahill, 2008

Water brought us together again!

We crossed oceans and plains to sit by a

lake, renewing our living baptism in action,
but much more so, stopping to reflect on
past journeys, and to hover, if ever so
briefly over bright waters
of Lake Michigan.

Together we anticipated what is to be.
No matter how we dream, or plan, or work
or play the strings of maybe...we know that
it will be, because of our gift to God of
faithfulness!

Thank you God of earth, water and sky
For being here for us.

Thank you God of winged birds flying
fearlessly over calm or troubled waters,
collecting fish for the harvest; knowing
that home is just a mile or two up the
road. Amen.

Maureen, you have reached your heavenly home. Enjoy! Enjoy!