

Sister Mary Jane Honan, CSC

(Sister M. Augustin)

March 5, 1923–April 24, 2022

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Marianne Farina, CSC. Sister M. Adria (Connors), CSC, read them at Sister Mary Jane’s funeral on April 28, 2022.

In 2001, her year of retirement to Saint Angela Convent in Kensington, Maryland, Sister Mary Jane Honan wrote a reflection about her life and ministry in Holy Cross. She offered detailed paragraphs about the places and communities where she lived and ministered, but attached only the brief phrase that she served “16 years in regional and congregational administration.” Isn’t that just like Mary Jane?

Sisters and family members speak about Mary Jane’s kindness, humor, honesty, courage and especially her simplicity.

The noun *simplicity* connotes more than the fact that the person has few possessions or lives within her means. It is about the person’s character. To speak of another’s simplicity, we acknowledge that she is “free from duplicity; upright, guileless, decent, friendly.”

Moreover, from the Latin we discover that the inner meanings of simplicity and simple are to be “one; as one; together with” and to have “singleness of nature, unity, indivisibility, immutability.”

Such guilelessness and firmness of purpose were evident in how Mary Jane mentored a newly professed sister, supported social justice efforts, and offered counsel to the Congregation as we experienced the challenging years of implementing the Vatican II reforms.

Sister Rachel Anne Callahan, CSC, recalls: “Mary Jane was my local superior at St. Mary’s Academy in Alexandria (Virginia). I credit her with saving my vocation. One example of her kindness and humor was her

manner of correction. The parlor was my obedience, and housekeeping was not my long suit. One day, I came in to find ‘please dust me’ on the parlor table. Enough said.”

Rachel also shares, “It was the turbulent ’60s, and some of us young ones were active and vocal in the civil rights and Vietnam War protests. Although she took some flak from older members, Mary Jane supported us in these actions.”

Sister Brenda Cousins, CSC, remembers when she was a freshman: “Mary Jane was principal at St. Mary’s Academy, and my parents’ CFM (Christian Family Movement) group got the idea of starting a school to help Black people get their GEDs and apply for jobs. Mary Jane was in full support of the idea. In addition to offering academic classes, there were classes on proper clothing for an interview and filling out applications.”

Regarding Sister Mary Jane’s time in regional leadership, Sister Mary Louise Full, CSC, shares, “As our regional superior, I found Mary Jane to be a good leader—she was kind, thoughtful and able to handle the challenges of leadership at a difficult time. She possessed an even temperament with a quiet, delightful sense of humor.”

Sister M. Rose Anne (Schultz), CSC, speaks of her experience with Mary Jane on general councils: “Mary Jane was a wisdom figure. She was an advisor to many who sought guidance, including two general superiors and their councils.”

As a general councilor and a member of various committees, Mary Jane participated in projects and programs that fostered innovative and courageous developments of the Congregation, such as: corporate renewal, summers of spirituality sessions, creation of the intercongregational novitiate in Denver, the establishment of the novitiate in Savar, Bangladesh, and the writing and approval of the 1978 *Constitution*, which is presently undergoing another revision.

As this list is bold and stunning, Mary Jane claimed that it was community life that was most important to her. And though she often

found the poetry of Emily Dickinson expressing well her ideas, it is T.S. Eliot that she quotes to capture the essence of community life:

What life have you if you have not life together?

There is no life that is not in community,

and no community not lived in praise of God.

At the heart of her vocation was the hearth. Her younger sister Jane reflects that in the family, “She was on the quiet side, but her presence was always felt. Everyone truly enjoyed her visits home every year and she enjoyed them as well. She was aunt to 10 nieces and nephews, three girls and seven boys. She was never inclined to sports but did her best to play ball with them in full habit.”

Sisters who lived with Mary Jane shared how she truly loved her sisters and was a good listener. As an avid daily newspaper reader, you might have found her in the community room or at a table pouring over its pages. However, she was quick to fold it up the minute someone arrived in the room—the only news fit for that moment was not in print but coming from you. Some of the staff who minister with the sisters in St. Joseph’s Community of Saint Mary’s Convent commented, “Mary Jane always tried to engage you, looking into your eyes with the strength of her soul. She was so gracious, and her smile warmed your heart.”

Reflecting on her friendship with Mary Jane, Sister M. Michaelleen (Frieders), CSC, recalls how evident it was that closeness to God was the source of her inner strength and joyful companionship.

Today, as we remember Sister Mary Jane Honan in this liturgy and in future sharing, may we realize that responding to God’s call to be witnesses of transforming love is a truly simple, yet profound and generous task that Mary Jane did every morning (as she stated): “I approach each day with hope and enthusiasm trying to meet the challenges of that day.”