

# **Sister Joanne Becker, CSC**

(Sister M. Clare Thérèse)

July 24, 1942–July 5, 2021

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, with assistance from Sisters of the Holy Cross, Holy Cross associates, family and friends, including Sister Joanne Becker. Sister Suzanne read them at Sister Joanne’s funeral on July 8, 2021.**

From Sister Joanne’s own words, we learn: “God invited me, Joanne Elizabeth Becker, into this world of beauty and promise.”

Born on July 24, 1942, in Washington, D.C., to Helen Josephine Roach and Karl Henry Becker, Joanne was the eldest of three. Along with her brothers, Dick and Jim, she was raised initially in Chevy Chase and later in Bethesda, Maryland. In her formative years, Joanne learned to pray the rosary from an aunt and uncle, and her godparents, who nurtured her faith life. Her maternal grandmother took her to various churches on Holy Thursday to visit altars of repose. She was a crucial influence on Joanne, helping her feel loved and aware of God’s constant care.

It is no surprise that at The Academy of the Holy Cross, Kensington, Maryland, Joanne was involved in the Catholic Student Mission Crusade and became Prefect of the Sodality. As a member of the senior class, she was chosen to crown the Blessed Mother at the May Crowning. Joanne maintained her devotion to Our Lady throughout her life.

It was at the academy that Joanne first met the Sisters of the Holy Cross. She entered the Congregation on September 4, 1961, together with 12 other young women from the Washington, D.C., area. One of these women was Sister Paula Goettelmann, CSC, who shared that it was Joanne who helped her through her discernment to enter the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Paula’s mother was not supportive of her religious vocation. In high school and later when Paula began nursing

school, Joanne lent her a sympathetic ear, writing letters encouraging Paula to persevere in her decision to come to the community. The ability and desire to help and support others was a keystone of Joanne's life from an early age. Paula is not alone in being grateful to Joanne for support and guidance over the years.

Upon reception of the holy habit on June 10, 1962, Joanne received the name Sister M. Clare Thérèse. Saint Thérèse, the Little Flower, was her favorite saint. Joanne felt God had given her a sign of affirmation when she received that name because she had written her letter asking for admittance to the Congregation on Saint Thérèse's feast day. Later, Joanne wrote that she "wanted so much to give my life to God forever." She lived her entire life in the spirit of Saint Thérèse, with simplicity and love.

Joanne became a teacher although, as she said, "I was supposed to be trained as a practical nurse, but the Eastern Province needed teachers. I loved teaching the younger children, third grade being my favorite. I found I had the gift of creativity and was always looking for new ways to interest students and make it fun."

Sister Joanne taught for 20 years in Catholic elementary schools and in parish religious education programs in Virginia, Washington, D.C., Texas, Illinois and Indiana. In 1986 she transitioned to library work in South Bend, first at Christ the King School and later at Holy Family School. She then became a library assistant at Holy Cross College, Notre Dame, Indiana. After retiring from this position, she later returned to volunteer there three more years.

After her stint of volunteering, Sister Joanne began work in Congregational Archives and Records. She wrote, "Curiosity had always been a trait of mine. Maybe that is why I like reading mystery. In my ministry with the archives department, it is a thrill to discover some of the unknown stories of those women who have gone before us. My life has been enriched by these stories. And I give thanks to God for the women who have been part of our history."

Sister M. Timothea (Kingston), CSC, described Sister Joanne as “an archivist’s archivist, a researcher’s researcher. If there were a medal awarded for persistence and thoroughness in researching an answer to a query, she would win the gold! Joanne was always gracious with people who called, emailed or visited the Sisters of the Holy Cross archives and made all the guests feel welcome and comfortable in their desire for information.”

Sister Timothea also observed, “As a staff member of the archives, Joanne supported her co-workers and shared willingly in all the duties and responsibilities of the department. She understood the feelings of frustration when material could not be located, so she was willing to stop her own research to offer a suggestion or help locate material—and always with a smile. Joanne established many relationships with her work in archives, so she will be missed.”

The Holy Cross Associates program also was very important to Joanne. She and Maureen O’Malley worked collaboratively in developing the South Bend Associates. They believed strongly that the associates have a vital role to play in the lives of the sisters and in their ministry and work. She developed a circle of friendships with the associates and was supportive of all their endeavors. Maureen stated, “As Joanne’s co-leader of the South Bend Associates, prominent to me was her sense of mission, her sense that she was called to give her best effort. And so she did. Bless her dear self.”

Sister Joanne was gifted with a sociable personality. She had a warm and sympathetic spirit that was accompanied by an open, frank and direct manner when dealing with others. This was never so evident as in her deep friendship with Sister M. Arlene (Kniola), CSC. As Lauren Kniola, wife of Sister Arlene’s nephew Tim, remembers, “By the time I became a part of the Kniola family, Joanne and Arlene’s friendship was already bonded. They always came to the Kniola family gatherings together — like Mutt and Jeff, or Laurel and Hardy, or probably most like Laverne and Shirley. Joanne, with her calm, sensible, quieter demeanor, was the perfect balance for Arlene. Before much time had passed, we were calling her Aunt Joanne.”

Lauren shared a Kniola Christmas family tradition: “Aunt Arlene would always start a ‘snowball’ fight with wadded up pieces of Christmas wrapping paper, and then Joanne would say, ‘We really shouldn’t be doing this,’ while joining in with laughing gusto! During the chaos of the day, though, Joanne would always take time to have a genuine chat with every person to check in and make sure we were doing well. Her caring personality showed through as she made a point to let us all know how much she appreciated and loved us.”

Sisters Arlene and Joanne were lifelong friends who shared a mutual love of art, nature and creation spirituality. Joanne felt her art was an expression of this spirituality and the attraction she had to all of nature. As she said, “I paint or watercolor what I love, whether trees, flowers or birds.” She favored pastels when working with colored pencils. Trips to Lakeside, Michigan, provided rest, reflection, retreat, or time to enjoy the company of other sisters at the Congregation’s recreation site.

Sister Marianne Farina, CSC, shared the many ways Sister Joanne added to the richness of her life in Holy Cross when she was living at Saint Mary’s. “I recall how she often told me how she prayed for me as she saw my light late at night, when I was working on my dissertation. She would offer a prayer to Saint Joseph for me to get it done! We had some great visits over the years, too. I treasure these times, these talks, the walk.”

Despite many health issues throughout her adult life, Sister Joanne persevered in her daily ministry to the end. Associate Sheila Mullen reflected: “Knowing Joanne has entered eternal life and is pain free brings sincere joy to my heart! Joanne’s strength during her suffering prompted my own personal faith acceptance. I find myself rejoicing, imagining Joanne and Arlene laughing in delight as they run along the East Coast dunes!”

As part of her daily prayer, Sister Joanne reflected on the readings of *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young. On Monday, the day Joanne died, Jesus says, “Nothing can separate you from My loving Presence” and “Be on the lookout for all that I have prepared for you.”

Certainly, Joanne is enjoying all that Jesus has prepared for her. Her Holy Spirit Band rejoices in a special way that she is with the Lord she so loved. Although we will miss her dearly, we are happy that she has joined our bandmate Sister M. Jean Barbara Korkisch, CSC, and that Joanne is now sharing God's plans for her well-being, plans not to harm her, plans to give her hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).