

# **Sister Dolores Jean Bray, CSC**

(Sister M. Francis de Paul)

November 8, 1934 – July 22, 2023

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Margaret Shields, CSC, with input from Sister Dolores' family and the Saint Catherine by the Sea community, where Sister Dolores long resided. Sister Eileen Dewsnup, CSC, read them at Sister Dolores' funeral on August 1, 2023.**

In the early hours of July 22, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, Sister Dolores Jean Bray, CSC, began her journey into eternal life. Like Mary Magdalene, Dolores is now with the One Whom she sought all her life. Like Mary, she courageously proclaimed gospel truth, especially in promoting justice and peace issues, and the role of women in the Church and society.

Dolores reflected the beatitudes in many ways during her lifetime. She was serious in forming and deepening relationships. From the time of her novitiate, she made a variety of efforts to keep her band aware of each other, encouraging each one in the sharing of what was important in her life!

In a discussion group, she mulled over her reasons for becoming a sister ... non-competitive, the belief that what binds people together is more important than what sets them apart. She wrote that the vow of celibacy freed sisters to deepen their relationship with God in prayer. She understood the vow of obedience as listening to God speaking in the depths of her heart. At the foot of one page, she wrote, "Everlasting friendships and corporate solidarity are difficult to find anywhere else."

After some years of teaching in elementary schools, Dolores was asked to be one of those to open a Holy Cross ministry in Ghana with four other sisters. The sisters describe her as a fun-loving person, though the first days for the Kasoa community were not easy. One story involved one of their neighbors

who was in labor. Dolores drove the mother to the hospital in the middle of the night. The woman delivered a baby girl. Because of Dolores' generosity, the young mother gave her baby daughter the full name "Dolores Bray"! She kept up with that family for years.

Dolores welcomed the changes in the Church brought about by Vatican II. Among them was an opportunity for her to serve in Catholic Charities' Older Adult Services and Intervention Services (OASIS) in Ventura, California. Here was the opportunity to serve the elderly, especially the poor and lonely. She became friends with her coworkers, as well as her clients.

Dolores also began writing, advocating not only for the marginalized, but for peace, the rights of women and for other justice issues. In October 2012, she was one of the reasons the Sisters of the Holy Cross received recognition from the Ventura Citizens for Peaceful Resolutions group for Commitment to Social and Economic Justice. Sister also advocated for peace, social justice and women's rights through her letters to archbishops and bishops, while other letters were published in the local newspaper. She was a regular at the annual prayer vigils, held in Plaza Park, for the homeless who had died on the streets. She sacrificed monthly Sunday evenings for meetings concerning nuclear disarmament and expressed concern via email against the death penalty. Another of Dolores' advocacies was as a member of the Council of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), helping refugees at the border of California and Mexico. In Bakersfield, California, with the mother of Sister Celine Dounies, CSC, Dolores organized a vocation fair.

Dolores seemed to be always ready to take a visitor around the towns of Ojai and Ventura. Sister stayed involved with the Holy Cross Associates, where she cultivated relationships and supported those drawn to the Holy

Cross charism. She worked and prayed for a fuller participation of women in the Church through giving fairly regular reflections during the weekday liturgy at St. Catherine's.

Sisters looked forward to the theological reflection group, where Dolores shared about the topics being discussed, relevant as to what was happening in the world and Church and religious life today.

Dolores was skilled and enthusiastic about taking pictures, and she was very generous in sharing this talent to capture events and memories for other sisters. She created numerous cards with her photos to give joy to others. She put unique handmade messages in the mailboxes for special occasions and a thank you for any kind deed. They often had an attached piece of candy. Jubilarians received a hand-stitched item of congratulations for their doorknobs. She brought joy to bandmates, family members and friends with delightful email cards for special occasions.

She engaged people in conversation in truly interesting ways, which put them at ease. They could share their burdens knowing that she cared. Dolores possessed the skill of getting other people involved in some of her projects. One such assistant found herself suddenly in charge after her first volunteer experience. Sister was also a regular at the 4 p.m. Rummikub games, where she was frequently a winner.

Dolores had a great appreciation for her family. Her niece, Sharon, shared, "My aunt Dolores, or Aunt D as we called her, was a remarkable woman and a remarkable aunt. She was a feminist long before I knew what that meant and a great champion of the underdog. Once Dolores was assigned closer to home, which was Oakland, California, the family had the opportunity to get to know her better. We would drive to her various locations around the Bay Area to visit and usually play at the schools that she worked at. I remember my mom and dad hosting dinners for Auntie and various sisters and priests at

our house in Fremont whenever she was passing through. And I remember her being around for many of our family's gatherings in Oakland. While she led a very rich, meaningful and full life in her religious community, she was also a very present member in the lives of her sister, brother-in-law, nieces and nephews. I think I speak for all of her nieces, nephews and their children when I say she will be missed at that Thanksgiving table, and whenever we hear about Ventura, we will picture her there in the town she loved so much."

Father Tom Loucks described Sister Dolores as "a prophet, called by God, dedicated to Our Lord, Jesus Christ, to announce the fiery word to a current civilization, to care for the poor, the prisoner, the neglected, and to remind all that the heart of God embraces all humanity."

When Dolores came to Saint Mary's, her first request of Sister M. Emily (Demuth), CSC, was to please visit her as often as possible and just read a brief Scripture passage, a poem or prayer, which Emily was able to do. They offered the office together for vespers from "This Day"; in fact, they prayed it together the very night before she passed away. She was most appreciative of the Saint Catherine's sisters in assisting with her transfer to Saint Mary's. She requested help to thank everyone who had assisted her at Saint Catherine's before she left Ventura. Until the day she died, she was compiling lists of persons to thank. She would make the list and tell Sister Emily what to say; this would help her be at peace. Needless to say, they did not complete the task; she passed away too soon.

Sister Dolores was ahead of her time, venturing into a variety of ministries. Her desire to live the social teachings of the Church and her desire to help the poor and unjustly treated directed her choice of ministries. She reflects so much of the transitions in the Sisters of the Holy Cross itself. In the end, she had a great desire to make the final journey to heaven. God answered her prayer. May she rest in peace.