

Sister Katherine Kase, CSC

(Sister M. Beatrice)

February 8, 1942–September 3, 2021

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Ruth Marie Nickerson, CSC, who read them at Sister Katherine's funeral on September 10, 2021.

“Balloons and rocks, spontaneity and stability are important to me,” Sister Katherine wrote in an early autobiography. Maturity and significant events affected her life but her love of surprise and celebrations, and her experiences of the power of God's love, were the rocks that kept her grounded, the stability that gave her hope.

In another document, when asked about her gifts, Sister Katherine shared that she was an ENTJ on the Myers Briggs and an 8 on the Enneagram personality tests, the traits of a leader, a woman in charge, a woman on a mission.

For those of us who know her life's journey, we would agree that she was, indeed, a leader with the traits of creativity, persistence and intuition. Her life speaks of one who is kind and thoughtful, generous and spontaneous.

Katherine's parents migrated to America. Her father, Helmuth John Kase, was from Bremerhaven, Germany, and a professional fine-dining waiter in Chicago, Las Vegas and later Long Beach. She learned from her father the sense of service by enabling people to enjoy themselves. Her mother, Sophie Janeczko, was from Poland. She was a beautician. Family life revolved around their working hours; family time was always a valued special event. Sophie taught her girls, Katherine and Beatrice, the value of generosity, to take responsibility, and to be practical. These teachings served Katherine well, for she dutifully took on many family responsibilities. As for her little sister, Beatrice, it wasn't until later in life that they became good friends! Katherine would frequently drive

to Philadelphia to see her sister and her nieces and nephew. Skipping a little ahead, during COVID-19, the Sunday family Zoom gatherings were very important to her. The local sisters' Zooms were all scheduled around the family Zoom.

Katherine and her sister began school in Chicago, and both completed elementary and high school in Las Vegas. Kathy graduated from Bishop Gorman High School. During her senior year, Kathy felt the call to religious life. She wanted to help others, but this decision was not accepted by her family and friends. She persisted. She went to work for a year to earn the money needed. She made enough to invite a friend to join her on an extended cross-country train ride to South Bend. Upon arrival, she said goodbye to her friend and knocked on the novitiate door. It was on September 3, 1961. In formation we had the custom that the sister with the highest rank in the class, who entered first, would be the mother of the band, kind of like the captain of the team. Katherine did not earn the title until the two sisters in front of her left the community. Our band for the next 60 years would frequently remind her of her role! It was on September 4, 1961, when my group of 12 to-be-postulants traveled by train from the Washington, D.C., area, tired and a bit afraid, and arrived at Saint Mary's. In the front entrance of the novitiate, she came bouncing down the stairs, full of energy, greeting us with, "Hi, I'm Kathy from Vegas," and flipped her hair. When a band made initial vows, it was customary to receive a band name; ours was Holy Spirit Band. When we would gather, she'd remind us to wear red.

Sister Katherine began her ministry as an elementary teacher in California and Idaho from 1966 to 1975. It was here that her gifts as a leader emerged and the Congregation saw in her the possibility of moving to high school administration. For eight years, she was assistant principal at St. Francis High School, Mountain View, California, and loved it. Then in 1984, the Congregation sought a principal for a new high school in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., that would bring three Catholic high schools together: St. Patrick's Academy, an archdiocese-owned school, but staffed by Holy Cross sisters;

Saint Cecilia's Academy; and another school. Katherine volunteered and was missioned to Washington, where she led the transition and served as principal at the new Holy Spirit High School, located in our Saint Cecilia's Academy. It was an inner-city high school that was fraught with enrollment and financial challenges, yet Katherine loved the mission and the girls. She worked diligently to keep it afloat. Then in 1989, the archdiocese closed four Catholic high schools, Holy Spirit among them. The abrupt closings, as you can imagine, caused her great pain, ministry discernment and prayer.

A year later, Sister Katherine was back in secondary education at The Academy of the Holy Cross. She went on to serve as principal, then, with a corporate structure change, she became the president and CEO of the academy. She served for 14 years. As a faithful daughter of Father Moreau, she felt compelled to nurture the minds and hearts of the students. At Katherine's urging, the iconic phrase "women of courage, compassion and scholarship" was added to the mission statement. She also undertook the development and implementation of a strategic plan that would bear fruit for years to come. Her vision brought to fruition the Science and Arts wing and a beautiful 400-seat theater. She initiated the Moreau Program, welcoming mentally and/or physically challenged girls into school life. During her tenure, the U.S. Department of Education recognized the academy as a Blue-Ribbon School. Katherine left her mark on the academy, her vision, her programs, buildings, and her belief in educating women in a Christ-centered community that values diversity.

In the last chapters of Katherine's life, I had the gift of getting to know her better, her strength of character, thoughtfulness, deep faith and compassion. She was a woman on a mission to help others even when her health was failing. She was always a teacher with the patience of Job, even teaching me the accounts at 75! Her words on her application to the academy, noted by me in the beginning of this memento, capture her for me. "Balloons and rocks, spontaneity and stability are important to me," and "From childhood I acquired a sense of independence and

responsibility.” Though an extrovert, Katherine cherished her privacy and private time. It recharged her to begin again.

Her involvement with the sisters at Saint Angela Hall grew with time, from simple assistance to helping coordinate life’s details. She deeply cared about the sisters, walking with them through life’s transitions. She would go the extra mile for them, respecting their privacy and always finding a way for balloons and spontaneity. Sister Marietta (Simpson), CSC, and Katherine could set an amazingly beautiful table. Again, Katherine was the lead person responsible for the closing of Saint Angela’s, easing the endings and passage to Saint Mary’s.

Katherine also assumed many responsibilities outside of Saint Angela’s. Among them was the organization and outreach to support the Saint Cecilia’s alumnae association. Recall that Katherine fostered the Moreau Program promoting quality of life for the mentally and/or physically challenged. This work continued with her good friend, Mary Lynne Boss, at Rosaria Communities, which supported building and renovating housing for independent living. She grew to become close friends with Gail, Mary Lynne’s sister, who she supported in her life challenges until her death a few years ago.

With the closing of Saint Angela’s, Katherine and two other sisters moved to Good Shephard Convent on the same street as two other small convents. They set up the house, chapter came along, Sisters Mary Tiernan, CSC, and Kathleen Moroney, CSC, were elected to leadership, and Katherine was left home alone. As fate would have it, or the inspiration of the Spirit, the convent was now available to welcome novices for their mission experience. Katherine had spent summers with the novices on Lake Michigan and she continued Saint Angela’s tradition to welcome them. She loved being with the novices and, as former vocations director, embraced our multicultural, international Congregation. She would frequently send me articles and virtual opportunities to learn more about immigration. I now wonder if her experience of being the child of immigrants didn’t spark such interest.

Katherine loved the community. She loved our communal celebrations. She also loved contributing to the ongoing work of the Congregation at all levels. Even during her time of treatment, her participation and opportunity to contribute meant much to her. Those of us who attended the Loretto liturgies during the shutdown were always happy to see her smiling face.

After the close of Saint Angela's, with few sisters in the area, Katherine assumed the role of keeping us gathering, talking and praying together. She was, indeed, our connector! During COVID-19, we had regular Zooms.

When Katherine was diagnosed with cancer, she didn't complain. She faithfully followed the doctors' orders. We watched the first year in amazement at how well she managed with such a serious diagnosis. When her condition rapidly advanced toward the end, Katherine bore her pain stoically. She was always grateful for the kindnesses extended to her by the staff, sisters and friends. Ann Pino Swaine, one of our former Holy Spirit bandmates, sent me a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, "Autumn." Katherine and Ann had shared poems during their time in formation. Ann thought "Autumn" very fitting for this moment:

The leaves fall, fall as from far,
Like distant gardens withered in the heavens;
They fall with slow and lingering descent.
And in the nights the heavy Earth, too, falls
From out the stars into the Solitude.
Thus all doth fall. This hand of mine must fall
And lo! the other one:—it is the law.
But there is One who holds this falling
Infinitely softly in His hands.