

Memento for Sister Ann Keating

(Sister M. Rose Angela)

December 6, 1925 - July 11, 2019

These memories were lovingly prepared by those who knew Sister Ann Keating, CSC, and shared their reflections. They were written by Sister Ruth Marie Nickerson, CSC, and read by Sister Patricia Riley, CSC, at the funeral on July 18, 2019.

On the Feast of Saint Nicholas, December 6, 1925, Sister Ann Keating was born to Vern Francis and William C. Keating in Sacramento, California. She was baptized Mary Elizabeth Anne, (with an E) and grew up being called Betty. In Holy Cross she received the name Sister Rose Angela and later changed her name to Sister Ann Keating. However, her sixteen nieces and nephews called her Auntie Angel, and her friends called her Ann without the 'e'. By whatever name we called her, we knew Sister Ann was an extraordinary woman. She tended to the needs of others with thoughtful care. Sister Ann is known for her nurturing, her cherishing, teaching, love and respect for life. She was a trailblazer, a pioneer in midwifery, an outspoken advocate for support and education of expectant and new mothers and infant care, a sister/nurse strong in management yet tender and wise in care of her patients, and as a master gardener. What is not so well known is her contemplative heart.

Sister Ann's mother's early death had a profound influence on her. She was very young when her mom died but old enough to dream that when she grew up she wanted to be a nurse just like her mom. She never grew out of her dream. As a boarding student at Holy Rosary Academy in Woodland, California, she felt a broadening of her dream to be a nurse, with the growing desire to enter religious life. One thing she was adamant about was that if she was going to be a sister, she would have to be a sister/nurse. With her strong determination and imagination, this California girl traveled to Indiana to enter the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1943.

Sister Ann excelled in nursing, first at the bedside, then as head nurse in surgery, emergency and obstetrics departments. She moved on to nursing and hospital administration at both Holy Cross Hospital, Salt Lake City, Utah, and at Saint Agnes Hospital, Fresno, California. It was a couple of years after

her return to Salt Lake City that she began the next phase of her life. She accepted an offer to become an instructor in obstetrics/newborn nursing at The University of Utah.

The university recognized something special in the way Sister Ann was able to relate with patients and with the student nurses at the hospital. She was a born teacher. While at the school her dream of nursing expanded again—she wanted to become a midwife. Sister Ann continued teaching while earning a Master's in Science in midwifery at The University of Utah in 1969. Becoming a midwife took her out beyond the Holy Cross hospitals. Embudo Mission Hospital, a very small, 28-bed hospital in rural New Mexico, was her first hospital as a midwife. The size and the remoteness didn't bother her. At Embudo, she was needed, and she thrived on being with the materially poor women and infants. She had time to care for and educate the mothers, time with the nurses and midwives, and what she loved most, time with the babies.

Midwifery was not embraced and often misunderstood in large, urban teaching medical centers. With Sister Ann's previous experience in obstetrics in large hospitals, she was recruited to ease the tension with the implementation of midwifery programs into medical centers. She would enter into dialogue with the opposition, and her calm, determined and persuasive manner won many over. At the same time, she also strove to enhance the education of the nurse midwives. She earned the respect and appreciation of many. First, she went to Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital in Los Angeles, California, then to the faculty of the University of Southern California, and then to other area hospitals. Her next stops were the University of San Francisco and San Francisco General Hospital. There, too, she was highly recognized and respected. Sister Ann loved her ministry—the majority of her patients were from economically poor households.

Chronic hip problems and the ensuing surgery brought Sister Ann's practice of midwifery to an end. However, she maintained her position on the National Board of Midwives and the review board for granting certification to new midwives. There is a wonderful quote from an article on Sister Ann where she says, "I must have delivered 500 babies. I might not have one of my own but, yes, I am a mother to many."

Sister Ann returned to Saint Agnes' Convent in Fresno in 1986 to recuperate from surgery. Her love of nature and little ones was only exemplified when

she arrived with 15 or more beautiful finches in a very large cage. She could name each one and was ecstatic when little ones arrived and tended to their needs. When a small convent was established across town, Sister Ann was asked to join. She was missed for her wonderful laugh, calm presence in the house, and her opinions, but the sisters were pleased that the birds had found another good home.

The medical center was also delighted to have Sister Ann return. She was well connected with the maternity and infant staff. Since nurse midwifery was not practiced in the hospital, she and her compatriots knew of other unmet needs of expectant and new moms and infants. So, as she recuperated, she designed a program, and Women's Health Services was born. It became an immediate success in Fresno. Sister Ann's new ministry coordinated a dozen or more support and maternity classes. The part she loved the most was the times she cared for the infants while the moms were in groups. Fresno women loved Sister Ann, too. She was named Woman of the Year in 1991. They recognized that she went above and beyond in support of women by encouraging them to find opportunities to support each other personally or in professional networking. With health care changes in 2001, and Sister Ann the age of 76, she moved to outpatient eye surgery as a recovery room nurse. To no one's surprise, the nurses, doctors and patients loved her.

In 2004, Sister Ann moved to Saint Catherine by the Sea, Ventura, California. Having her best friend Sister Patricia Burke, CSC, there eased her transition. She always loved gardening and began spending more time in the garden. Then in true Sister Ann style, she studied to become a master gardener. She delighted in planting and nurturing the flowers and plants. When no longer able to work in the outdoor garden, she focused on the potted plants that found their way to her little patio. Saint Catherine's also gave Sister Ann something she desired her whole life—time to pray.

And when it was time to go to Saint Mary's, as her mobility and health diminished, she would find ways to postpone going until it could not be put off any longer. She went reluctantly. She was surprised, however, by the warm, welcoming community and the caring staff. Daily Sister Ann grew in gratefulness and peace.

One more lasting memory of Sister Ann, that many of us who lived with her or knew her well will recall, was finding her in a quiet place, sitting alone

or in the chapel. Sister Ann was a woman of prayer, contemplative prayer and centering prayer. It was prayer that nurtured and sustained her all through her life.

We are grateful to her niece Mary and nephew Tom for being with us and representing Sister Ann's beloved family as we celebrate her life as our Sister in Holy Cross. Together we send her home to our loving God. Please convey our condolences and prayers to Sister Ann's sister, Rosie, and brother, Jerry, and her half-sisters Kathleen and Sister Mary Margaret, BVM, and all the family. We rejoice with her parents and four siblings who went before her and were there to welcome her in. Can't you hear her contagious laugh as she greets them? Sister Ann once dreamed of being a nurse, religious sister, midwife and gardener—she lived her dreams as one extraordinary woman.