



Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate

On Friday morning, February 1, 2019, our sister, Mary Catherine Uchman, crossed the threshold from this life into eternal life. Dying as she lived, she took comfort in knowing that she was held in the hands of a loving and faithful God as well as the hands of her loving sisters and faithful friends.

Born in East Chicago, Indiana, on July 3, 1937, Mary Catherine was welcomed into life by her parents, Catherine Ann (Mahoney) and Bruno Uchman. Serendipitously, her birth was commemorated by fireworks, a custom that would follow her through life, making every birthday celebration equally as special as the eve of the 4th of July! Growing up with her younger brother, Jack, in St. Francis de Sales Parish, she was an intelligent, good-humored, strong-willed, affectionate and energetic “big sister.” Such were the qualities that continued to characterize her way of being over the course of the rest of her life. Influenced and inspired by the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate who were her grade school and high school teachers, Mary Catherine responded to the invitation to follow in their footsteps and at seventeen years of age, she embraced the Franciscan way of life.

On September 6, 1954, Mary Catherine entered the postulancy as one of the youngest members of her class. Moving through the process of initial formation, she was received into the novitiate on August 13, 1955, and given her religious name, Sister Mary Camille, in honor of San Camillo, a 16th century saint who committed his life to the care of the poor, the sick and those on the margins of society. Though in time she would return to her baptismal name, the spirit and example of her patron saint remained a source of inspiration as her ministry to the People of God unfolded in anticipated and unanticipated ways.

After making her first profession of vows on August 12, 1957, Sister Camille was missioned to teach fourth grade at Sacred Heart Parish in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago. It was a turbulent time in a neighborhood affected by racial tensions and urban unrest. It also was a time of testing during which the Sisters of St. Francis were called forth to be instruments of peace in troubled times. For the next decade, Sr. Camille devoted herself to engaging the imaginations of nine and ten year olds in four different parochial schools. Ever attuned to the joys and hopes of the world as well as its griefs and anxieties, her heart was moved, not only by the immediate needs of the children and parish communities she served, but also by the new challenges facing the Church in the wake of Vatican II. Writing to Mother M. Borromeo Mack from Sacred Heat Convent in Wilmette, Illinois, on February 25, 1967, Sr. Camille volunteered to serve in the Congregation’s mission in Brazil. Describing herself as “unworthy in comparison to those Sisters who were serving in Goiás already,” she underestimated the degree of support that she would receive in light of her passion and vision for mission. Within a matter of months, she found herself on the way to Brazil where she fell in love with a

Alleluia!



Sister Mary Catherine Uchman, OSF

people, a culture and a church that captured her heart and radically transformed her understanding of mission, the struggle for justice and the ministry of Franciscan presence. Affectionately known in Santa Helena de Goiás as “Irmã Chave” (aka Sister Key), she joyfully accepted the Portuguese pronunciation of Kay and welcomed the nickname which carried its own symbolism and enduring value.

Returning to the Joliet area six years later, Sister Kay shared with other returning missionaries from Latin America the experience of coming to terms with the challenges of “mission in reverse.” Or, put another way, she entered into a process of discovering how her experiences in Brazil prepared her for mission and new forms of ministry in the context of the United States, the church, the congregation and, most especially, in the midst of those made poor by the realities of life. Assessing the signs and needs of the times, and building upon her undergraduate degree in history from the College of Saint Francis, she pursued a Master’s degree in Social Work at George Williams College, while working at Guardian Angel Home. Upon completion of her degree, she worked as a psychiatric social worker for the Will County Health Department. Serving those affected by mental illness, addictions and social marginalization became the focus of her life and ministry. Eventually, in 1980, this commitment led her to the Southwest, specifically to Arizona, where she worked in a variety of capacities for the Maricopa Medical Center as a psychotherapist and administrative supervisor until her retirement in 2002.

A vital contributor to the Joliet Franciscan presence in the West/Southwest for almost forty years, Sister Kay, while courageously accepting the physical limitations brought about by illness, did not allow her condition to determine or diminish the quality of her life or vocation. Long before Pope Francis gave voice to the “Joy of the Gospel,” our Sister Kay embodied it among her network of family, sisters, friends, neighbors, care-givers and anyone in need of a smile, a gesture of gratitude or a loving *abraço*. Coming home to Our Lady of Angels in July of 2018, she continued her ministry of presence and prayer in ways that touched the lives of those who shared with her the last leg of her journey home to God.

As we remember our Sister, Mary Catherine Uchman, let us give thanks to God for the gift of her life and her witness to the joy of the Gospel. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Sister Mary Catherine Uchman, OSF

July 3, 1937 — February 1, 2019

Born: July 3, 1937
Parents: Bruno H. Uchman and Catherine Ann (Mahoney) Uchman
Postulancy: September 6, 1954
Novitiate: August 13, 1955
First Profession: August 12, 1957
Final Profession: August 13, 1960
Entered New Life: February 1, 2019

Ministry History

1957-1959 Teacher: Grade 4, Sacred Heart, Englewood, Chicago, Illinois
1959-1963 Teacher: Grade 4, St. Raymond, Joliet, Illinois
1963-1964 Teacher: Grade 5, St. Joseph, Freeport, Illinois
1964-1965 Teacher: Grades 4, 5, St. Matthew, Champaign, Illinois
1965-1967 Teacher: Grade 6, Sacred Heart, Hubbard Woods, Illinois
1967-1973 Education and Pastoral Ministry: Santa Helena de Goiás, Brazil
1973-1974 Social Worker/Volunteer Coordinator/Visiting Resource Coordinator: Guardian Angel Home, Joliet, Illinois
1974-1976 Student: George Williams College, Downers Grove, Illinois
1976-1977 Social Worker/Therapist: Will County Health Department, Joliet, Illinois
1977-1978 Psychiatric Social Worker: Will County Mental Health Clinic
1978-1980 Psychotherapist/Program Coordinator: Will County Health Department
1980-1981 Psychotherapist/Supervisor of Social Services: Maricopa County Hospital, Phoenix, Arizona

Wake: Thursday, January 3, 2019, 2:00-6:45 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet
Prayer Service: Thursday, January 3, 2019, 4:45 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet
Mass of Christian Burial: Thursday, January 3, 2019, 7:00 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet
Burial: Friday, January 4, 2019, leaving Our Lady of Angels at 9:00 a.m. to Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, Illinois
Interment: Section 8, Lot 344, Grave 1, Resurrection Cemetery
Predeceased by: By her parents, Bruno H. Uchman and Catherine Ann Mahoney
Survived by: Her brother, John, and nieces and nephews

Rest in Peace, Sister Mary Catherine!