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O B I T U A R Y

**Sister Catherine Mary McGuigan, OP**

*(S. Venard Marie)*

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Sister Catherine Mary McGuigan, OP was called home to God a day after her 98th birthday, an occasion she eagerly had anticipated.

Catherine was born in Brooklyn, New York, on August 20, 1926, the third child of Henry and Zelda (Daley) McGuigan. She joined her two older brothers, Harry and Robert, and several years later the family was complete with the birth of her brother Richard. In 1940 Catherine entered the Dominican Juniorate, and upon graduation, she entered the novitiate in Amityville on September 8, 1944.

Catherine received the Dominican habit on August 6, 1945 and received the name Sister Venard Marie and the title "of the Sacred Heart". She was a White Gladiola and cherished these flowers, and the sisters in her set, the rest of her life. She professed her first vows on August 6, 1946 and her final vows on August 23, 1949. When Catherine's brothers were called for military service, Catherine wrote to her mother asking if she should come home to help. Her mother replied. "No. God needs you more than I do."

Catherine began her sixty-plus years of ministry first on the elementary school level in St. Joseph's, Long Island City (1946-52); St. Margaret's, Middle Village (1952-57); and St. Ignatius, Hicksville (1957-60). In her last year at St. Ignatius, she taught a class of one hundred eighth grade boys. One of those students, William Van Nostrand, met her at a church breakfast in St. Patrick's in Huntington where she was then living in the parish convent. Bill has been a loyal friend and frequent visitor from that time.

From elementary school Catherine moved on to teaching high school religion in St. Agnes, Rockville Centre (1960-66) and Queen of the



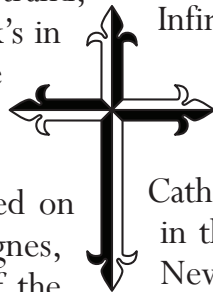
"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!"

- Isaiah 52:7

Rosary Academy in Amityville (1966-70). It was after these more than two decades in traditional education that she became a trailblazer. At the request of Rev. Frederick Schaeffer, she moved into diocesan ministry as the Director of Pastoral Services (1970-79). At that time, the emphasis on religious education not just being directed to children but to persons of all ages was just beginning to emerge. This new position entailed teaching classes in Basic and Advanced courses in theology for catechists of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Thus, Catherine's influence moved far beyond the classroom as these dedicated volunteers taught in their parish religious education programs for children and parents. Catherine ran workshops, invited noted speakers, and acted as a resource contact for anyone who wanted information. The high quality of religious education in the diocese is due in large part to Catherine's leadership.

Her creative activity was not only related to ministry, however. In 1972 she became part of an intentional community in Our Lady of Lourdes Convent in Massapequa Park. After a brief sabbatical at Weston Priory in Vermont, Catherine returned to Long Island. In 1980 she was part of a small group of Sisters who lived in Brentwood during which time she ministered in St. Anne's parish as the Director of Religious Education and then served her sisters in the Motherhouse Infirmary in Pastoral Services.

Catherine longed to be a Pastoral Associate in the Rockville Centre, but that was not possible at that time. So, the adventurous Catherine moved on again to this ministry, first in the Church of the Assumption, Morristown, New Jersey (1987-90) and then in the Parish



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of the Sacred Heart in the town of Auburn in upstate New York (1990-94). Returning to Long Island in 1994, Catherine then served in the Adult Formation Program on St. Ignatius in Hicksville, where she once taught as a young Sister. That school was her last teaching experience on the elementary level, and now it was the last place of her official theological service. Her ministry had come full circle.

Catherine “retired” in 1994, first living in Harvest Grove in Lake Grove and then in St. Patrick’s Convent in Huntington before she moved into Amityville in 2015. But Catherine never really retired. Wherever she worked and wherever she lived, she gathered people into small prayer groups. Some of these persons were women who had made the At Home Retreats with Catherine, an activity she enjoyed immensely. She considered it a great grace for her to be able to lead people to recognize the presence of God in their lives. When Catherine left Lake Grove, she thought these prayer groups would need to cease meeting since she would not be able to drive to their locations. She was pleasantly surprised when the prayer groups moved to her, wherever she was living. These meetings were eliminated by the restrictions of Covid 19, but many of the members of those groups kept in touch with her, even sending cards and gifts for her last birthday. Catherine always invited her family and friends into larger and larger circles. She had the uncanny knack of “enlarging her tent”, long before that concept and phrase became popular.

With all her accomplishments, Catherine made time for pursuing many interests. She loved to sing and to dance, to enjoy visits and meals with family and friends, to read mystery stories, to play card games and Rummikub, to sit by the ocean, to name but a few. She also enjoyed traveling all over the United States. She visited the Grand Canyon, participated in the Lands of Dominic pilgrimage in Europe, and took a cruise to Alaska with her friend Sister Lucide.

Catherine had eagerly awaited her 98th birthday. Her niece and nephews came from Connecticut to celebrate that momentous occasion with two birthday cakes, a large banner, a sash reading “Today is my 98th birthday”, and a t-shirt proclaiming, “98 years Blessed.” Surely, she was! During the singing of Happy Birthday, Catherine joined in the singing and proceeded to sing the entire “Darktown Strutters Ball”, which is a family favorite. She assisted her niece in cutting the first piece of the cake and ate several forkfuls. The day after her birthday, God called her into a new birthday into eternal life.

Catherine epitomized the Dominican call to be “signs of joy and hope.” Always with a smile on her face, Catherine accepted the ups and downs of daily life. She is known for encouraging others to “Hang Loose”, using the Hawaiian sign which is raising the pinkie and thumb of the right hand while folding the middle fingers into the palm. While this was basically a humorous gesture, Catherine meant it as shortcut to trusting in the providence of her loving God whom she served for 80 years of her life.

She is survived by her nieces and nephews in Connecticut: Maureen, Patricia, Daniel, and Richard; the local nieces and nephews: Mary, Catherine, Diane, Christine, Robert, Michael and Patrick, and all their families. She will be greatly missed by myriads of friends, especially Patti Daly Matonti, Eileen Thompson, William Van Nostrand, Patricia Crisci, and the sisters in her community, especially Sister Anne-Marie Kirmse. All those whose lives she touched will rise up and call her blessed!

The wake and funeral for our dear Sister Catherine will be held on Tuesday, August 27, 2024, in St. Albert Chapel in the Motherhouse in Amityville. Visitation will begin at 11:00 AM. Morning Prayer will be at 12:30 PM followed by the Mass of Christian Burial. Interment will follow in St. Dominic Cemetery on the Motherhouse grounds.

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