

“A Woman for All Seasons” – Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly, OSU

Date of Birth

July 26, 1929

Date of First Profession, taking the name “Dorothy Ann of the Cross”

July 16, 1954

Date of Entrance into Eternal Life

March 27, 2009



Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly’s spiritual journey was the central aspect of her life, always guiding her actions, decisions, and relationships with others. She responded to the call to religious life shortly after her CNR graduation in 1951 and continued to live out her commitment to her vows until her very last day on earth.

As an Ursuline Sister, she dedicated her life to serving God and others with compassion and unwavering values of love, mercy, and justice. Her deep faith in both God and the human capacity to affect good in the world served as encouragement to others seeking to deepen their own faith. Inspired by so many other holy women and men who came before her, she seemed to instinctively know when and how to show the gentlest kindness and/or deliver the truth of harsher realities.

Many people recall her innumerable works of mercy – both corporal and spiritual – that manifested her spirituality and most frequently remained unknown to others. From his own experiences, James Magee, former CNR Sociology professor, shared, “On one occasion, DAK provided an impromptu and extensive religious history of the College.” When their son learned of his cancer diagnosis on his 21st birthday, Sister told the Magees to contact her for anything they might need. She was known to quietly use her connections at Sound Shore Medical Center to confirm that you were seeing the top specialists in New York. When Jim arranged for a pacifist group to meet in the CNR auditorium only to learn that they could not afford the rental fee, it was Sister Dorothy Ann who found the funds to cover the expense. He remembers completing his application for employment at CNR with a form that asked what papers (scholarly) he had delivered and since he had not yet delivered any, he jocularly wrote that he had delivered the *Brooklyn Eagle* at age 13. He was hired and Sister eventually offered him her high-quality copy machine to print his dissertation!

She visited the sick and was regularly at the bedside of her good friend and former chair of the CNR Board of Trustees, Jim Nicholson, after he suffered a stroke. Many alumni, colleagues, and friends knew the comfort of her wisdom and safety of her discretion when they sought her counsel no matter what the problem. On the lighter side, as Prioress of St. Teresa’s Community her grace and thoughtfulness were evidenced with seemingly simple touches that brought greater joy and dignity to everyday life – an accessible refrigerator stocked for midnight snacks, cloth table linens for birthday celebrations. In her days as Provincial Prioress of the Eastern Province she grappled with graver issues of financial challenges, optimal living arrangements, and adequate health care for all her Sisters, determined to provide the best quality of life.

Joan Bristol, who headed student services at CNR during Sister Dorothy Ann’s presidency, called her a “guardian angel who taught through example, showing others how to accept and value all people. She spotted potential in individuals and invested time and energy to nurture, affirm and encourage them to achieve beyond their wildest expectations. She understood the realities and humanities of life. She was a modern saint sent to touch the lives of ordinary people.”

Sister Mary Sullivan described Sister Dorothy Ann's spirituality as a "Covenant—a straight commitment, based on her strong relationship with God, with Jesus. Dorothy Ann did not speak much about her spirituality; she lived it. Her faithfulness to prayer extended to her mission; it extended to everyone in her life and to everything she did. She lived out of a strong trust that empowered her to deal with issues going on in the world and to be open to all kinds of people and points of view. She was a woman of strong conviction who did not disregard people who disagreed with her."

Sister Dorothy Ann and Sister Mary worked closely as Provincial and Assistant Provincial. After their daily morning review of whatever challenges the province faced, Dorothy Ann would ask: "So, what do we do now?" Mary characterized Dorothy Ann as "future oriented. She was a complicated person; able to look at obstacles and to move forward. Dorothy Ann knew there was always more to be done. On the day she died, after praying her morning Office, Dorothy Ann wrote in her address book the prayer with which we have all become familiar."

"Gracious God, help us to work with you to make this world alive with your Spirit and to build on earth a city of justice, love and peace."

Throughout her own spiritual journey, Sister Dorothy Ann regularly planned and actively participated in retreats, meditative reflections, forums, and communal worship to stimulate her own spiritual growth as well as provide opportunities for others. She had a distinctive focus on women and the laity that was in sync with the times. Coming from a home that encouraged independent thinking and educated in an order that demanded the best use of one's talents provided a winning combination for her to stretch and test her own mind and spiritual health along with the wider community. She often invited visiting scholars from other distinguished institutions to speak at the College.

A 1962 issue of *Quarterly*, featured a four-page spread on the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican which she wrote to explain and clarify what a council is, rules for how it must proceed, necessary conditions and processes, historical references, and expectations for outcomes. (Remember her Masters in American Church History.)

A 1967 issue of *Tatler* showcases a lecture on Teilhard de Chardin that she arranged.

In 1975 she was a founding member of the Inter-religious Council of New Rochelle, a group seeking to deepen the connection and communication among people of different faiths. Rabbi Amiel Wohl of Temple Israel of New Rochelle called her truly ecumenical in person and in deed. She was also a member of the Coalition for Mutual Respect founded during the 80s for different congregations to hold special events and joint worship services at a time of increased racial and religious unrest.

In 1990, "A Forum on Spirituality" with six sessions entitled "Healing Losses," "Martha and Mary – Women's Quest for Integration and Wholeness," "The Gift of Inner Peace," "Therapeutic Touch," "Women of Passion," and "Healing the Shame Within," featured CNR professors, Ursulines (including herself), and the director of the "Story Shoppe" at the Mariandale Retreat Center.

A 1993 day-long conference on Thomas More, "A Man of Conscience," followed a format of papers presented, panel speakers, and general discussion.

At a celebration of Christian women in action, Sister Dorothy Ann received the "Woman of Spirit" award from the two Catholic churches in Larchmont, NY on the eve of the Feast of Saint Ursula in 1994 for helping women fulfill their goals.

Together with her colleague and friend Sister Brigid Driscoll, RSHM, president of Marymount College, Sister Dorothy Ann jointly sponsored a series of four forums held over two years and hosted at CNR

which were titled "The Church Women Want." Material presented, discussion that ensued, conclusions formed, and new questions posed were then published in 2002 in a book of the same title edited by well-known theologian Sister Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, another close friend of Sister Dorothy Ann.

At Alumnae College 2002, soon after the news broke of the sexual abuse crisis within the U.S. Catholic Church, shocked alumnae looked to CNR for help processing the disturbing information. Having developed much of their adult spiritual formation in relationship with the College, they instinctively sought guidance. It was Sister Dorothy Ann who responded with a spontaneous session in Maura Living Room. With so many questions and so few answers, her steadfast faith in God's goodness despite the horrible facts being reported was a reassuring reminder of the need for prayer and thoughtful action. Those present that day will never forget her firm stance that no level of human imperfection would tear her faith from her.

After that first impromptu gathering, Sister organized several panels of lay and religious speakers that met in St. Teresa's chapel to address the crisis with updated facts, share their personal perspectives, and discuss possible paths of action. Those meetings evolved into the group called the "Upper Room." Sister Dorothy Ann invited alumnae and friends of the college to form a leadership committee of lay Catholics concerned about Church reform in the wake of the clerical sexual abuse scandal. With her guidance along with other Ursuline Sisters, attendance sometimes reached 200 people and that group continued to meet for six years after her death.

Alice Duffy Grant and Beth Ball Hofstetter of the Class of 1963 were active leaders on the committee. Alice shared that Sister Dorothy Ann was her spiritual guide and role model from her early student days through her presidency of the Alumni Association and up to her continued relationship as a strong, active CNR and Ursuline advocate. She collaborated with Sister in strategic planning efforts ranging from strengthening financial viability of the Eastern Province to celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Ursuline presence in New York, all the while witnessing first-hand, Sister Dorothy Ann's renewed commitment to the vocation she had been called to in 1951. Alice continued, "in each instance, Sister had an extraordinary ability to grasp an issue, articulate it effectively, and move people to appreciate its significance and immediacy. She was ever the inspiring teacher! What I came to realize as the source of her personal charisma was her deep prayer life."

The citation that accompanied the honorary degree bestowed on Sister Dorothy Ann by Iona College reads, "As a member of the Ursuline Order, Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly has exemplified the leadership and commitment demonstrated by its founder. 'A good heart can do nothing but good and holy works,' said Angela Merici. Those privileged to know her became ardent admirers of her empathy and understanding as well as her genuine warmth and artful diplomacy. She delivered a message of hope and affirmation of faith with compassion and conviction."

At her funeral, Sister Elinor Shea shared reflections from a eulogy that Sister Dorothy Ann herself had given at the service of a friend. She had spoken of the communion of saints and our belief, our gift through faith, that we will be united again with our loved ones. Sister Ellie reminded those who packed Holy Family Chapel, "We are all interconnected, Sister Dorothy Ann is still available to us, and she is decidedly *not* resting in peace!"

The prayer card distributed at her wake not only carried the prayer repeated below, but also conveyed the sentiment that "the prayer reveals the spirituality she expressed in her life" as well as the invitation that "as we celebrate her life and legacy...let us carry on her prayer."

"Gracious God, help us to work with you to make this world alive with your Spirit and to build on earth a city of justice, love and peace."