

## REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER GRACE KATHRYN BAYLESS

### September 4, 1936-November 13, 2013



All of us who knew Sister Grace Kathryn would agree that she lived out the words of Saint Elizabeth Seton: “Knowing as I do your heart’s desire to serve God purely, I can say nothing to you . . . but to keep well to what you believe to be the grace of the moment.” Sister Grace Kathryn served God “purely,” responding to grace where she ministered and where she lived.

Sister Grace Kathryn was born to Grace and Roy Bayless; she had an older brother Roy, and a younger sister and brother, Barbara and Jay. These family members, along with Roy’s wife Irene and Jay’s wife Angie, close to her always, were all present during her recent illness and were with her at the moment of death. They are here this afternoon, along with nieces, nephews, other family members, as well as many loyal friends.

The Bayless family lived in various locations in Pittsburgh as the children were growing up. Sister Grace Kathryn attended Saint Raphael School, Morningside; Saint Kieran’s, Lawrenceville; and All Saints, Etna. She graduated from Etna High School.

God’s grace then took her to Washington, D.C., where she worked for twelve years for the United States Navy in the Bureau of Navy Personnel. She did general clerical work and supervised three other clerk typists. During this time she won several awards for outstanding performance and grew in love for the Navy and the United States.

We don’t know how long Sister Grace Kathryn thought of religious life, but at Saint Matthew’s Parish in Washington, she found a friend and spiritual director in Sister Regina Therese, a Holy Cross Sister who later wrote:

“Any suggestion I have made for self-improvement Kay has followed . . . with perseverance and effort . . . She is cheerful, generous, and adapts to situations easily. She has an earnest desire to serve God within a religious community and I feel there is a genuine vocation here . . .” At Saint Matthews’s Parish, Sister Grace Kathryn volunteered for various projects and Sister Regina found her assistance genuine, intelligent, and willing. “. . . she works well with others regardless of age span.”

On August 22, 1966, just a few days short of her thirtieth birthday (considered “older” at that time), Sister Grace Kathryn entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, the community she had known at Saint Kieran’s, and the community, she wrote, that her mother particularly liked.

Sister Grace Kathryn was attracted to the work with hearing-impaired children at the De Paul School for Hearing and Speech and began her ministry there, spending seven years as an aide, girls’ supervisor, and coordinator of transportation. Sister Grace Kathryn was then called in a different direction—to use the secretarial and business skills she had developed in earlier years. She served at Seton-La Salle, Sacred Heart, and Oakland Catholic High Schools; Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, Saint James, and Sacred Heart Elementary Schools; and Seton Hill University. She came to the Stephen Foster Center, operated by the

Catholic Youth Association in Lawrenceville, as Office Manager in 1995. She served there until her so-called retirement in 2011—16 years. In all her positions, Sister Grace Kathryn was focused, accepted responsibility, and was willing to give extra time.

When Sister Grace Kathryn applied for a sabbatical year in 2011, Sister Brycelyn Eyler wrote that Sister Grace Kathryn, a quiet yet enthusiastic person, “transcends” her role as office manager at the Stephen Foster Center. Sister Grace Kathryn “transcended” regular ministry wherever she was. At Sacred Heart and Oakland Catholic High Schools, she went with Sister Felicita Diggin to all the student basketball games, far and near, even to playoff games at a greater distance. At Stephen Foster she entered into everything and worked extra hours for the annual fund-raising dinner. Always, she sold tickets and chances for the Center and for the Sisters of Charity. She quickly became part of any group with whom she came in touch, creating a friendly spirit among them.

A small seal on a lifetime of reaching out to others was given in January, 2011, when Sister Grace Kathryn received the Manifesting the Kingdom Award from the Diocese of Pittsburgh, an award given to those who “demonstrate the presence of Jesus in their lives and have participated in an exceptional way in showing forth the kingdom of God among us.”

Sister Grace Kathryn was no less kind and thoughtful in her private and community life than she was in her ministry. She made friends wherever she went. A friend from the years in Washington, D.C., continued to send a Christmas package of goodies every year. Another friend from the Stephen Foster Center, at first nervous about relating to a Sister, found her immediately to be easy to talk to—“like a friend or neighbor.”

In the convents where she lived she seemed to find all the small but important tasks: emptying the dishwasher, recycling paper, buying the soft drinks, washing pots and pans. The Gospel reading Sister Jeremy Mahla chose for the Vigil last evening spoke of the Good Samaritan who, without notice or fanfare, cared for a person in need, a person others passed by. With her kind actions, her notes, her words of encouragement, Sister Grace Kathryn was, in many ways, like the Good Samaritan.

Of course, Sister Grace Kathryn’s spiritual life—her love of God, was the foundation for all she did. In 2011 she had a sabbatical year of prayer, study, and reflection at Berakah in New Hampshire. She wrote: “Words cannot express how joy-filled the Sabbatical has been.”

For 47 years, Sister Grace Kathryn, our “Grace,” lived the words of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, to respond well to the “grace of the moment.” Sister Grace Kathryn’s prayer at the time of her Silver Jubilee is ours today: “May God bless us as we endeavor to do His will in our journey.”

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection*  
*~ Sister Brigid Marie Grandey, SC*  
*November 18, 2013*

