

FUNERAL REFLECTION FOR SISTER MARY NOEL KERNAN

June 10, 1926 – April 17, 2022



Sister Mary Noel was the first daughter born to Jack and Bess Kernan on June 10, 1926. She entered the Sisters of Charity in 1948 from St. Bernard's Parish in Mt. Lebanon. Baptized Mary, she was one of nine children. Already awaiting her in heaven are her parents, her aunt, Sister Teresa Clare, her brothers, James, John, Paul and David and her sisters, Jean, Julie and Sister Eileen , OSF. Her brother, Frank, and her many nieces and nephews survive her and many are here today.

I feel as though I've known Sister Mary Noel almost my whole life. I grew up in Mt. Lebanon and attended St. Bernard's Grade School. The Kernans, though some years older than me, were an active and well known family at St. Bernard's.

Sister Mary Noel earned her degrees from Seton Hill University (BA), Duquesne University(MA) and a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. Sister Mary Noel's field was English and she taught in several of our high schools and then in the English Department at Seton Hill University for many years. One rarely saw Sister Mary Noel without a book in her hand! She was an avid reader and lover of words.

Sister Mary Noel wrote this about her life choices. "In God's will is our peace. Religious life provides ways of continuing to learn God's plans

for humankind, for all creation, and for oneself personally. It has helped me to shape my life in response.”

Sister Mary Noel didn't just settle in to teach English. She felt strongly that “we should face the truth and do something about it” in our society and country. This led her to become an active member of the congregation's Peace and Justice Committee and to teach GED students at the local prison in Greensburg and to work with migrant and seasonal workers in Dover Delaware in the summer. In her application she told the Dover program that she could “type, file, drive a car, cook and teach.” She also opted to be part of our congregational cultural immersion program by being the first American sister to spend a year in Korea teaching English at St. Joseph's High School in Kang Jin. She continued to love the Korean people and especially her students for the rest of her life. During that year in Korea, she also visited Sister Gemma in Israel and this had a profound effect on her life in the years that followed.

So, in 1989, she received another call to promote study, dialogue and ever deepening understanding of the Holocaust. Along with Sister Gemma Del Duca and Seton Hill President JoAnne Boyle, they founded the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education at Seton Hill. The work of the Center was to educate educators about the Holocaust so that new generations of students would understand its significance. Sister Mary Noel, as one of the Co-Directors, organized Scholars Conferences on the Holocaust at Seton Hill, and handled stateside arrangements for participants in the annual Catholic Institute for Holocaust Studies in Israel. She says of this experience, “The Center wasn't something I expected in my life. I think of it as a gift from God.”

As a result of her involvement in the Center, Sister Mary Noel became a member of the Executive Committee of Pittsburgh's Christian/Jewish

Dialogue Commission and a member of the National Christian /Jewish Workshop Program Committee. She and Sister Gemma were instrumental in helping the Greensburg Diocese to adopt a Holocaust Education Program for teachers and their students in 1994.

Seton Hill University honored Sister in 1993 with its Distinguished Alumna Leadership Award and the Diamond Jubilee Award for long and distinguished Service.

In 1997, Drew University honored Sister Mary Noel as the first Honorary Life Member of their newly created Niemoller Scroll, named for Martin Niemoller, a Lutheran pastor who resisted the anti Christian, neo-pagan religion of the Nazis.

Sister Mary Noel decided in 1997 to retire from the Center.

Perhaps, JoAnne Boyle words to Sister Mary Noel in accepting her resignation say it best:

“As we move ahead we know we can do so because of your persistence in advancing , tirelessly and eloquently, the Center’s work. I celebrate with you your accomplishments at this time, the triumphs over adversity, and friends and colleagues won to the cause, the educators educated, and the many, many students ultimately touched through your efforts.”

So we say with Gemma, JoAnne, Lois, Sybil and all of your friends and family: “Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into your reward!”

Sister Vivien Linkhauer