

SISTER SUSAN JENNY

February 5, 1941, to May 5, 2022



Sister Susan was born in Cleveland, Ohio to Marian and John Paul Jenny on February 5, 1941. When Susan was two years old, the family moved to Pittsburgh where her father worked as an engineer for Alcoa, and her mother, an excellent seamstress, was very active in Church and education. Susan has two sisters, Trudi, who is a year and a half younger than Susan, and Kate, seven years younger. We are happy they are with us this morning as we thank God for Susan's dedication and commitment of 62 years to religious life as a Sister of Charity of Seton Hill.

Susan attended St. Bernard Elementary School in Mt. Lebanon and Elizabeth Seton High School where she met the Sisters of Charity. She enjoyed being on the yearbook staff and belonging to the Glee Club and Fatima Club. She loved our sisters especially Sisters Marita Ganley, Alice Ruane, Mary Noel Kernan, and Rebecca Kelsey. When Susan attended a retreat at Seton Hill and helped with the festivals, she got to know the sisters outside of the school atmosphere.

When Susan graduated from Elizabeth Seton High School, she talked to her parents about her desire to be a Sister of Charity and they were not supportive so Susan enrolled at Duquesne University majoring in English. A year later, she approached the subject again and her parents accepted her decision. Susan entered our community on July 1, 1959, and continued her studies at Seton Hill University initially with a group of art majors but realized it would take too long to acquire an art degree, so she returned to an English major. Eventually, she received a B.A. in English from Seton Hill University and a Master's Degree in Theology from St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Much later, Susan began a Doctor of Ministry Program at the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Studies. Because of her ministry obligations and congregational responsibilities, she decided to withdraw. She said, "I know I will always be a student at heart and will take an occasional course on a topic with immediate applications." She was a life-long learner.

Susan taught middle school students in diocesan schools before she was assigned to Seton Hill University to start a Religious Studies Department. This was a good but difficult transition from middle school students to college students. After teaching theology classes for five years, she became the Dean of Students, a ministry Susan said she learned by “trial and error.” She held this position for six challenging years amid upheavals—anti-war protests, Vietnam, racism, feminism, and other issues. Her next assignments at the University were Coordinator of Tutoring, Director of Campus Ministry, and teaching in the theology department.

1982 was a wonderful year for Susan. She went back to St. John’s University for a sabbatical, had a full schedule of classes, and went to Israel to study during the second semester. During that time, she lived in Jerusalem. Susan expressed that this time was, for her, a “life-changing experience.” When she returned from Israel, Susan went back to the University to teach and revise the curriculum.

For the next six years, Susan was the Director of Postulants and Novices and became a guiding light in the Religious Formation Conference as she served on the National Board. She was involved in the Federation of the Sisters of Charity, and all the local religious formation groups in Pittsburgh and Greensburg. At the end of her term in Initial Formation, she wrote a report entitled “The Many Hats of Formation” and described the changes in religious life and national and global life as shifting faster than anyone could comprehend. She portrayed herself as wearing a baseball cap during the first year because she made the team and after six years in formation ministry she was wearing a beanie with a spinning pinwheel on the crown representing there were no definite directions to follow next. Only Susan could capture the ups and downs of formation ministry so well through the images of wearing different hats.

While Susan was the Director of Initial Formation, she was appointed as the Program Director at our Doran Hall Retreat and Renewal Center. When her terms for those positions were completed, she moved into the Greensburg Diocesan Office of Parish Life and Ministry and then the Office of Pastoral Life. The focal point of this ministry was educating and enriching the faith lives of adults. She was committed to developing and implementing a lay ministry formation program to enable the laity to claim their roles in the post-Vatican church. She traveled throughout the diocese to give workshops “teaching people to become church.” In addition to co-authoring a book on Revising the Parish Pastoral Council, she wrote countless articles for the Greensburg Catholic Accent. After Susan completed her terms in the diocesan office, she became the Director of Faith Formation at the Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, and then the Coordinator of Ministry Formation at Mt. St Peter’s.

Susan always used her many talents to serve on Sister of Charity committees, creating prayer services, giving lectures on Elizabeth Seton and Vincent de Paul, and almost any topic that parish groups wanted. She most likely never said she was too busy to do whatever she was asked to do—and she did it with ease! In 2012 Susan was elected to the Sisters of Charity leadership team and served two terms as Provincial Secretary.

Susan was rather nonchalant about deadlines and very often needed extensions to finish a project or a report. It recently came to our attention that this is a family trait and family members rarely got anxious about completing a task on time...must be in Jenny's DNA! Nevertheless, Susan's many gifts were appreciated by our community and coworkers: her creativity, artist's eye, her writer's way with words, generosity, deep spirituality, patience with a variety of styles and personalities, her ease in allowing the Spirit to work among others without too much human interference, her passion for lay involvement in church ministry, are but some of her God-given talents. She said the following of herself, "I'm a good thinker, seeing connections, looking at the 'big picture,' being playful with ideas, and, especially as I've grown older, I've been drawn to contemplation, which I interpret as seeking meaning beyond the obvious." She was optimistic. She hoped for a future in which "The Sisters of Charity would experience a re-foundation, a re-visioning of the community like the original band in Emmitsburg or Altoona, to put in place a new outpouring of Charity, suited to these times and realities". Perhaps we can commission her to make that happen now that she is in a better place.

Susan lived with cancer and treatments for about five years. She would go to her appointments in the morning and then come to work at DePaul Center. As the years went by, her exhaustion became more apparent, but her faith and trust in God did not diminish. She never complained and her coping skills were remarkable.

After she moved to Caritas Christi, it was a little easier for her to handle her slowly deteriorating condition because of the wonderful, loving care of our nursing staff which she often mentioned. However, when she went to her last appointment on April 22, she told her doctor she was discontinuing chemotherapy because the aftereffects were so difficult. She was at peace with this decision and thought as we all did, she would have some restful, comfortable days but there were only a few for her to enjoy.

On one of those "good days", she had two requests. Her blue jacket needed to be cleaned, the one she always wore on special occasions and Susan said, "My funeral is one of them." She later chose the blouse, scarf, and, of course, earrings, not dangling ones, as she liked to wear, as they would fall back and not dangle! Her other request was simply to acknowledge her gift of faith in being a child of God through baptism by

having her baptismal certificate and candle next to her casket. In less than two weeks after deciding to end chemotherapy, Susan went peacefully home to God. Susan's last days with us were characteristic of the way she lived her life—calm and prayerful.

We are receiving an outpouring of messages telling us of the ways Susan has touched the lives of so many people similar to this one titled A note of gratitude:

“When I read the obituary for Sister Susan Jenny, a smiling, loving sister remembrance came rushing into my mind and heart. I was saddened to realize that Sister had passed on. I give thanks to our God of Love for all the ways she was gifted to share your charism with so many others, myself, being one of them. Her warm smile remains with me as I hold her in special prayer today. May she intercede for you to help keep your spirit and charism alive.” And there was this brief comment that captured Susan's spirit: Susan, a visionary creative force for good in the world.”

Susan, We love you; We will miss you. You shared your many gifts with us and we owe you our deep gratitude. We know that you will be watching over us and interceding for us until we meet again in the company of our loving God, our loved ones, the angels, and saints. Rest in peace.

~ Sister Eileen Johnston