



**We remember  
Sister Mary Ellen Quinn, RSM  
1929 - 2008**

~ a Sister of Mercy for 60 years!

*Eulogy by Sister Norita Cooney (Dec. 4, 2008)*

Good morning and thank you all so very much for joining us to celebrate the life and death, and new life of our own Mary Ellen Quinn. I want to offer a special word of appreciation and support to Mary Ellen's family: her mother; brothers: John and Priscilla, Jim and Betty, Father Ed Quinn; and her many nieces, nephews and cousins as well as her grand nieces and nephews.

Family was very important to Mary Ellen and she was so gracious in sharing all of you with us. For years at Christmas time she would take her nieces and nephews and later grand nieces and nephews to visit our sisters at Mercy Villa, our retirement center. They also gathered annually for the "Christmas in the Woods" experiences at Knowles Mercy Retreat Center.

I know we cannot comprehend your pain at losing Mary Ellen even as we struggle with our own deep sadness. But rest assured, Mary Ellen will continue to walk with us as we strive to live up to her abiding confidence in each one of us.

We remember too today the families in La Union, New Mexico, who were such an important part of Mary Ellen's life in her ministry at Our Lady of Refuge Church. The funeral service is being videotaped so that the people of her parish can also celebrate her life and her ministry with them.

As family and friends of Mary Ellen, we all know her the history. She was a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a cousin and a member of the Sisters of Mercy Community for 60 years. She was a teacher and administrator "par excel lance" in grade school, high school and college.

For 17 years she served as the administrator of the parish in La Union, New Mexico, and also served for a time as Chancellor of the Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico. Bishop Ramirez who is the head of the Diocese of Las Cruces is with us as our homilist today.

The Sisters of Mercy will always be profoundly grateful for the years Mary Ellen served as president of the Omaha Regional Community and as a member of the Leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union in Bethesda, Maryland. Today, however, rather than talking about what Mary Ellen did, I would like to share some reflections that Sister Rita Parks and I have of the Mary Ellen we knew and loved over these many, many years.

There is an old church hymn that has always been a favorite of mine: *Pilgrims on the Journey*. The refrain of that song, I believe, say it all:

*We are pilgrims on a journey.  
We are travelers on the road.  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.*

For the Quinn Family, the Sisters of Mercy and the many, many people whose lives were touched by Mary Ellen over the years she was indeed a strong, faithful, delightful, supportive and also very realistic and efficient companion on this journey through life. Mary Ellen was so empowering and affirming of each one of us. She would continually remind you of your gifts and encourage you to share these gifts with others. And, because we all had such respect for Mary

Ellen, we would try to live up to her dreams for us. At the same time Mary Ellen was a very realistic and practical person. She saw our weaknesses as well as our strengths but was never judgmental.

I was reading an evaluation of Mary Ellen when she was in the novitiate. The Mistress of Novices said, and it's so very true: "She does not hesitate to give her opinion but she is also very willing to listen." The Novice Mistress went on to say, "We could use a hundred more like her."

Mary Ellen was the president of the Omaha Regional Community in the 1970s when we faced many challenges after Vatican II. I believe her leadership was a turning point for the community and she helped us build a very solid foundation for the future. She had great trust in the community and great hope for the church. At the same time Mary Ellen knew how to work the system in the best sense of the word to do what should be done for the good of all and she did it all with a great deal of integrity.

Yesterday I receive an e mail from Theresa Kane who was president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union when Mary Ellen served on that Leadership Team. I think Theresa's reflections on Mary Ellen say best what Rita and I have been trying to say:

"Mary Ellen was a very unusual woman-she had special qualities; the likes of which I have not found in one person since. She was conscientious, focused, single-minded, determined, courageous, gentle yet strong; curious and humorous; domestic but with a deep missionary drive as we know from her many years in the Southwest. She seemed to have an astronaut yearning-traveling unheard of distances in a very short period of time-less than half a day to Jacksonville, Fla., from Silver Spring, Md., and one long day from Maryland to Omaha-about a 1,000 mile trip. She was a truly remarkable woman; a spirited and spiritual woman. My love, prayers, blessings, tears and beautiful memories accompany all of you as you offer your final farewells. There is a saying-I think it is Irish!!-'It was heaven with Mary Ellen; we will miss her so!'"

As we journey through life we are blessed to have people like Mary Ellen leading the way through

the sometimes threatening terrain that we must encounter in our travels. She was not afraid to face difficult decisions even at her own personal risk and never hesitated to take those risks if she believed it was necessary for the good of the community.

I'm not sure who Mary Ellen's companions are now as she undertakes the journey into her new life, no doubt her father and her niece Kathy are two of those companions, but Rita and I have a few words of advice for those who now walk with Mary Ellen:

First, always be mindful of what you say. Twenty or 30 years from now Mary Ellen will be able to quote word for word the comments you made. She will also tell you where you were when you made these comments and might even describe what you were wearing at the time.

Second, be prepared to be invited by Mary Ellen to share your gifts with others on a regular basis. Know too that Mary Ellen will also share her gifts-again and again and again - no matter how much she has on her plate.

Third, know that Mary Ellen will never hesitate to correct your spelling or your grammar. She will do it graciously but she will do it.

Fourth, never underestimate the love and support you will receive from Mary Ellen. She will be there with you in good times and bad and her confidence in you will never be shaken.

Fifth, remember that Mary Ellen does have one very real limitation. She can never get the punch line of a joke straight no matter how much she practices.

Finally, we just want to say tell you how blessed you are to have Mary Ellen now walking with you on the journey into her new life. We believe she will also continue to guide us until that time we join her once again for all eternity.

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