

## **SISTER JEAN REIMER, OP**

Entered eternal life on September 11, 2022  
at the age of 92  
after 68 years of religious life

Evening Prayer with Remembering:  
Sunday, September 18, 7:00 p.m.  
Chapel of the Word/Marywood

Mass of Christian Burial:  
Monday, September 19, 10:00 a.m.  
Chapel of the Word/Marywood



We commend Sister Jean to your prayers.

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*“Going on mission is something I like doing. Another language, culture, people, place.  
It has nourished my soul. It gives me another glimpse of God.”*

Sr. Jean Reimer, 2004

One of seven children of Alex and Ethel Reimer, Jean was born on November 8, 1929, in Saginaw, Michigan. She had four sisters and two brothers. Jean’s elementary education took place in four schools: Stone public, St. Andrew’s, SS. Peter and Paul and St. Mary’s, all in Saginaw. After graduation from high school, she entered St. Mary’s Hospital School of Nursing in Saginaw and received her RN in 1950. She had three years’ nursing experience, including public health, general medical-surgical, and pediatric before entering the Grand Rapids Dominicans.

Since the tenth grade Jean had felt drawn to religious life. She wanted to be a Maryknoll or Medical Missionary Sister, but her parents opposed the missionary idea. She found an affinity with her Dominican teachers and through this experience and the encouragement of Fr. Michael Wolf, she entered the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood in 1953. At her reception into the novitiate, she received the name Sister Ann Joachim of Our Lady of the Rosary, later changing back to her baptism name of Jean. After her first profession of vows in 1955, she was missioned to Pioneers Memorial Hospital in Brawley, California where she served for three years.

Responding to a request from Mother Victor to train as a psychiatric nurse, she studied at St. Mary’s College, Leavenworth, Kansas, where she received the degree Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She went on to Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. for her Master’s in Nursing on a full scholarship. Then she spent five years at Nazareth Sanatorium in Albuquerque, New Mexico, four additional years at Valley Convalescent Hospital, El Centro, California and then returned to Brawley. Moved by the plight of the people in Biafra, she requested to be sent there, but was counseled to find something closer to home. Thus, she spent a summer in Mexicali, Baja California in Mexico to work in pastoral ministry, and to study the Spanish language in order to fulfill her heart’s desire to engage in missionary work.

From Mexicali Sister Jean was missioned to Guatemala. For ten years, Sister Jean served in a pastoral ministry capacity, became fluent in Spanish and conversant in the native language of the people where she lived. She felt privileged to collaborate with a team of native people in LAMP (Latin American Mission Program), visiting rural villages. This was a “most stretching experience and one that formed my faith,” she reports.

Sister Jean was grateful for all of her experiences, even the two she reports as “singular” – the 1976 earthquake in Guatemala, and the abduction by the military of that country in 1981. Of the former she relates

the terror of witnessing the destruction of the village and hearing the cries of the people throughout the long nights and days of the disaster as she and her companion suffered along with the people, sleeping outdoors, and shuddering with each aftershock.

Of the latter, being kidnapped and held prisoner for five days along with Sister Helen LaValley, she says little, as she was ever conscious of the need to protect those who worked for their release. She wrote it was, “an international event and brought so many people to be in solidarity with our leadership, the sisters, our families, and ourselves. It too has left its formative power in my life.” Although eager to return to her beloved missionary work in Guatemala, it was deemed too dangerous and so she entered a Network Intern Program, lobbying on behalf of Central America in Washington, D.C.

Returning to her home city, she served for six years as a charge nurse of rehab and director of long-term care in Saginaw, as well as area coordinator for the congregation. Sister Jean returned to the Southwest to work at the Annunciation Refugee Center in El Paso, Texas, and later joined the pastoral team at Maria Madre de Dios Mission Church, Juarez, Mexico. Her work at the inter-congregational Presidio, Texas Family Health Center was recognized by and officially honored by the Presidio Diabetes Awareness Community.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in the former Soviet Union, an opportunity arose to do missionary work among the people in Russia who were unaware of the reforms of Vatican Council II. In addition to her love of missionary work, she was intrigued by the possibility of visiting the land of her father’s birth and befriending his people. First, she went to Vladivostok in a nursing/social service capacity with Sisters of St. Agnes of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. There she participated in Home Health Care and visited hospitals where victims of an earthquake were treated. The following year she returned to Novosibirsk, Siberia with Sisters Jeanne Marie Jones and Thomasine Bugala.

Jean returned to Grand Rapids and worked in the Clinica Santa Maria outreach to the Hispanic community. When she retired in 2002, she volunteered in various ministries at Marywood. However, her desire to experience new cultures was not over. In 2003, she packed her bags to cross the Atlantic again, this time for volunteer service at the Dominican Monastery Ste. Marie de Prouilhe, Fanjeaux, France. Here at the cradle of the Dominican Order she assisted at the guest retreat center.

Friends describe her as fiercely determined, with a laser focus on her commitment to Christ. Her manner of speaking was truthful and direct, while at the same time, gracious and sensitive. And she was a person who got things done wherever she was. She was instrumental in helping the Congregation establish the Women's Center, *Esperanza*, in El Paso. Whether providing clean water and nutrition for the poor or initiating the composting at Marywood, Sister Jean saw what was needed and took action to make it happen – quietly and effectively.

She viewed her struggle with Parkinson’s disease as an opportunity to identify with those who have few choices in life. “She has taught me what a heart of a contemplative is all about,” recalled one friend, “it is to have the world always in mind, to have compassion with those on the margins, and to be one with them.” Sister Jean lived Micah’s words to walk humbly and simply, to act justly and love tenderly.

Sister Jean’s gifts for languages, her compassion, and missionary heart touched all who knew her. *Vaya con Dios, Au revoir*, and in the Russian language - *do svidaniya* Sister Jean. May God, and the angels, all you loved and who loved you greet you on this your last great adventure and first perfect joy.

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Sr. Jean is survived by her sister Joyce Nelson, Mackinaw City, MI; sisters-in-law Margaret Reimer, Cincinnati, OH and Sue Reimer (Bill) Scott, Glen Ellyn, IL; brother-in-law James Sullivan, AuGres, MI; nieces, nephews, many friends and members of her Dominican Community.