

Tribute: Sr. Kathleen Hanley
Date of death: March 26, 2021

How many of us remember seeing Sister Kathleen Hanley at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Bettendorf or Christ the King Chapel in Davenport directing the CHMs and others at a Jubilee celebration or, perhaps, the inauguration of new community leadership? Her resume is filled with scenes of “all things music” from teaching and directing in elementary school classrooms in IA, IL and MN, to city-wide choirs in Lewistown and Billings, MT, to her own membership in a national choir of sisters. She left music in the air wherever she has been.

Kathleen Selma Hanley was born on July 21, 1942 in Lewistown, MT, to Edward and Selma Wieglanda Hanley, the first of eleven (11) children. She says she grew up on the organ bench of St. Leo’s Church as she was born into a family of musicians. She had an aunt, a professional pianist, who had met George Gershwin in New York. Kathleen was baptized and made her first Holy Communion in St. Leo the Great Parish where the Sisters of Humility taught.

After high school she entered the Congregation of the Humility of Mary on September 8, 1960. She received the habit and her name in religion, Sister Edward Mary, the following summer. She was finally professed in 1968, following changes from Vatican II specifying that sisters have a minimum of five (5) years of temporary vows before final profession. She has surviving “classmates” Sisters Judith Carrara, Kathleen Henneberry, Catherine Linnenkamp, Rosie Restelli, Johanna Rickl, Nancy Schwieters and Mary Penelope Wink.

Sr. Kathleen earned an associate degree from Ottumwa Heights College and a B.A. in English from Marycrest College in 1965. She had student-taught with Humilities at St. Vincent School.

She taught classroom music, band, and private lessons at St. Austin in Minneapolis, MN, St. Pius X in Rock Island, IL, St. Henry’s parish school and

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Lenihan High School, where she had the choir and was director of youth ministry, in Marshalltown, IA. She studied during summers at Seattle University from which she earned a Master's degree in Religious Education in 1973. From 1970-78 she was Chair of the Religion Department and engaged in youth ministry at Columbus High School in Cedar Falls, Iowa. The Choraliers was a well-known choir there. Not to be forgotten, she did her share of CCD work at Grundy Center too.

Sr. Kathleen began more direct service to the Congregation of the Humility of Mary when she was named Integration Coordinator in 1978, living at the formation house on east 14th Street in Davenport. In that role she was responsible for the orientation and development of women choosing to live religious life as a Sister of Humility. Women were entering a very different kind of religious life from what she had experienced. Humilities, like most religious congregations of women, were living in a long period of experimentation following the directives of Vatican II. All aspects of religious life were being re-examined including the vows, especially obedience, community life and ministry. In preparation, she studied in the familiar program of religious formation and spiritual direction at Marillac College in St. Louis. She was elected to the Region X Executive Board of the National Religious Vocation Conference in 1980.

The Spirit had more in mind for Sr. Kathleen when she was elected Vice President to serve during the second term of Sr. Ann Therese Collins from 1980-84. It was during that period that the board of Ottumwa Heights College and the sisters voted to merge with Indian Hills Community College. As part of the agreement, the community college was to purchase the sisters' property. In turn the sisters elected to build a new community center in Davenport on land leased from the diocese. The community members processed the move from the place with which they were

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identified for over 100 years, by recalling the valiant women who had left all behind in France when they traveled to America in 1864.

The physical transition, itself, was a huge operation that Sr. Kathleen oversaw. Some of those who participated have lots of memories of that time. Imagine the Heights chapel, empty of pews but loaded with rows of beds, dressers, desks, lamps and other furnishings for sale to interested buyers. The operation succeeded with the help of many hands. Once the sisters were settled in Davenport in 1983, Sr. Kathleen was named Coordinator of the Retired Sisters, a role she would fill until 1986.

The opportunity to launch a new ministry in parish liturgical music and celebration drew her back to her home state in 1986. In Havre, MT, she did all of the preparation of lay persons in St. Jude Parish for participation in the liturgy – training them for proclaiming the Scriptures, distribution of the Eucharist, and, of course, gradually expanding their participation in the music for various liturgical occasions. She had her first city-wide choir there, too. In 1988 she jumped at the opportunity to serve in her home parish, St. Leo the Great, in Lewistown; she spent five (5) years there until 1993. As Director of Music and Liturgy, she was responsible for sacramental planning for communion and penitential services, baptisms, and anointing of the sick. She participated in regional and national meetings of the National Pastoral Musicians Association. In the summer of 1990 she studied organ and conducting at St. John's University in Collegeville, MN. She was in demand as a cantor and directed a city-wide choir in Lewistown, too. She was happy to spend time with her mother there.

With so much being developed in liturgical practice, it was time for Sr. Kathleen to personally “drink from that well.” She went to Santa Clara University in San Jose,

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CA, where she earned a Masters of Arts degree in Pastoral Ministry in 1995. While there she came to know the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who hired her as Executive Secretary for the California Province, based in Saratoga, CA, where she served for five (5) years. In that capacity she kept a data base of the members in the province and prepared the annual report of community statistics sent to Rome. She contributed to various publications and was responsible for all mailings to members in the province.

She shared her music talent with multiple parishes in the area. At St. Therese Parish in San Jose she conducted the San Jose Symphonic Choir and played the piano on occasion. At St. Nicholas Parish in Los Altos she played and sang, and did liturgical planning for all the sacramental services. The parishioners advanced from simply singing “songs” at liturgies to having appropriate music for specific liturgical services, including psalm responses with a cantor. At Sacred Heart Parish in Palo Alto she played the organ for funerals of Notre Dame sisters. It was during this time that she was a member of a national choir of Catholic sisters called “Sisters in Song.”

After a couple of years of rest and renewal in Davenport and Billings, she accepted the position of Music Director at St. Patrick Cathedral in Billings where she would stay for the rest of her life. Sr. Kathleen loved gatherings with her mother and other family members. The usual destination was the family compound in Maiden. Her mother’s wish to die in Maiden actually happened.

Selma is memorialized in the block that Sr. Kathleen made for the community quilt produced for the bicentennial in 2000. She used fabric from a quilt made by and given to her by her mother, and fashioned it in the way her grandmother worked.

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That meant starting with a single piece of fabric at the middle of the block, with pieces added around it like a spiral.

One of her joys was being part of an intercommunity group in the Great Falls-Billings diocese, women who became close friends and supported each other. Included were Ursuline and Franciscans Sisters, Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, KS, and Mercy Sisters from Ireland. In February 2017 a Notre Dame sister invited them to a prayer group that would “Circle the Cities with Love.” They would meet in the living room of Angela’s Piazza, a residence for homeless women. The monthly gathering, that included silent meditation and intercessory prayer, has continued up to the present, with participants changing as sisters came into and left the area. In 2015 Sr. Kathleen enjoyed a memorable trip to Rome with some of them. It was one of these sisters who responded to Sr. Kaye Holland’s concern about Sr. Kathleen on March 25. The congregation and Hanley family thank these women for their actions and share the loss with them.

In addition to limitations due to the pandemic, the Holy Week services at St. Patrick’s Cathedral were surely missing someone in 2021. But who of us would deny her singing “Let the mountains skip with gladness, and the joyful gladness ring” in heaven on Easter? Might she even have been invited to do some directing?

Sr. Mary Rehmann, CHM

Volunteer archivist