

## Remembering Sister Jean Laubacher (Eymarda), IHM Feb. 26, 1923 – Jan. 7, 2022

"As I look back over my life, I can honestly say it was a happy one — simple, nothing spectacular..."

This introduction, in Jean's brief autobiography, contains a common refrain I heard from her. She saw her life as ordinary, nothing unusual, "simple, nothing spectacular."

Jean stressed the commonplace, the everydayness of her life. She was almost apologetic in agreeing to do an oral history. What would there be to tell? No dramas to unfold, no remarkable appointments, no glorious achievements.



Of course, to me, Jean's presence was always quite striking. Ever alert and gracious, her conversation proved uplifting and aware. Even her physical presence was striking - fairly tall, with an easy stride, her hair in lovely waves that still in her nineties revealed a shade of their original hue.

Born on Feb. 26, 1923, Jean was the third child of eight children born to Margaret (Keffler) and Herman Laubacher. She described a family of eight siblings: Mary, Ed, Jean, Tom, Bernard, Olivia, Joe and an infant boy named Joseph who lingered only 20 minutes in this world. Of solid German ethnicity, Herman and Margaret gave their children a secure and happy home.

Mr. Laubacher worked as a bookkeeper for Canton Drop Forge. On weekends he was a professional barber. Jean recalled that "Dad enjoyed this extra weekend job with its camaraderie and extra cash from which on Saturday evening, I prepared all our Sunday Church envelopes for Mass the next day."

Fearing that the Depression would cost him his job, he had the foresight to invest in an 83-acre farm so the family would have food to eat during the lean times. Mrs. Laubacher and the children, as well as three other relatives, became farmers providing for their needs for two-and-a-half years during the Depression. When Mr. Laubacher's bookkeeping job proved to be secure, they moved back to Canton. The farm was rented out on shares, enabling the continuance of a healthy food supply for their large family.

Jean went to St. Joseph School in Canton, Ohio, where she had St. Joseph Sisters from Rocky River, Ohio. While living on the farm, Jean went to an elementary school taught by the Sisters of St. Augustine. She finally came to know the IHM Sisters at St. John the Baptist High School in Canton.

From her parents, Jean acquired a great love for music — popular, band and church

music. Song and dance enticed her. She chose Mass attendance on Sundays at the liturgy where the men and boys' choir performed. In the convent, she relished the singing of the novices. Frequently, the Casavant organ here in the Motherhouse, embellished by Terry Jankowski's excellent renditions, uplifted her spirit. Having a happy home life and school life, and an especially satisfying social life in high school did not give her incentive to become a sister. "It was not until my senior year that I *feared* God was calling me to Religious Life." It is true, however, that she had some inkling of her call at age eleven. She wrote, "The morning after the family's first trip to the Motherhouse to visit with Mary, my sister, I had a deep feeling of longing to be a part of that beautiful building [the Motherhouse], a sort of homesickness to be there, bringing tears to my eyes." In her enjoyment of high school days, however, she let that longing pass.

So with some reluctance, she entered the IHM Community in June of 1941. "I represented one rooted and formed by my devout parents with twelve years of Catholic Education, the foundation of my spiritual life."

Not until she was a novice did her sense of belonging settle her ambiguity. One evening after night prayer, on her way upstairs, she sensed a deep peace. She understood then that this life was filling her spirit with a sense of wholeness, belonging and quiet joy. She understood, "certainly . . . this was definitely the vocation God meant for me — to be an IHM Sister; no doubt about my religious vocation entered my mind ever again."

When Jean was in junior high, the sisters had called upon the students to pray to Blessed Peter Julian Eymard for blessings upon the Eucharistic Congress held in several Ohio cities. Dutifully, Jean prayed.

As a postulant, she sought to receive some variation of her parents' names for her reception into the novitiate. For one reason or another, her request was refused each time. Just before reception, Mother Ruth suggested that Jean take the name Eymarda. The name didn't appeal to her, but she thought, "How can I refuse?"

At first she didn't make the connection between her religious name, Eymarda, and Blessed Peter Julian Eymard who had been recently canonized. When she learned about his life and his love of the Eucharist, suddenly she found her name richly meaningful. It made sense to be Sister Eymarda and she was drawn to devotion to Christ in the Eucharist. Her very name drew her more deeply toward that devotion and she found much support in our most recent Constitutions.

Jean wrote, "On Friday, Jan. 2, 1944, after my first profession, I was assigned to St. Hugo of the Hills." Jean loved this new experience. Soon, like so many IHMs, she moved along to new locations in teaching: St. Francis de Sales, Holy Redeemer, St. John's in Fenton where she was one of four pioneers in opening a mission. After St. Mary's in Mt. Morris and Our Lady of Good Counsel in Detroit, Jean returned to Monroe and became a critic teacher to assist the junior sisters in their beginnings as educators. "I think I learned more from them than they learned from me," she mused.

Soon Jean was a principal at St. Joseph School in Trenton. Another interlude of classroom teaching at Holy Name, Birmingham, preceded Jean her years as Administrative Assistant at Nativity School, in Hollywood, Florida. Those years of friendship and shared ministry with Sister Suzanne Molloy and her ties with the children brought satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment to her full-time career in education.

After 19 years at Nativity, she moved into retirement. Moving into St. Catherine Parish in Sebring, she assisted Sister Mary Ann Kane in welcoming new members through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). There she trained lectors and used her skills to teach adults to read. "My love for Florida never left me," she said.

At age 75 she turned her attention to the Motherhouse. She knew there was much she could still do for the sisters here. Soon we saw her in many forms of service: as a lector and Eucharistic minister in the chapel, as a driver and companion to doctors' offices, a shopper for those who weren't as able. In these and other ways, she was a cheerful and able friend to all.

One of her most precious gifts has been the companionship of her sister, Mary. They had many days and hours together. Jean was so grateful for Mary's constant love and support. Thanks to her sister-in-law, Dorothy and other family members, Jean and Mary enjoyed family gatherings at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter and on entertaining trips over the years. She loved the opportunities to become better acquainted with nieces and nephews. "We both appreciated having our first cousin, Carola Keffler, in our community with whom we shared conversations and visits with our relatives.

"As I said in the beginning, my life has been a happy one, nothing outstanding, as I tried each day to love God and do my best as a Sister Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

"My whole life was a simple and happy time..." This has been Jean's consistent conclusion and summation.

It is true that Jean's years resembled the experience of many IHMs. At the same time, those of us who knew her discerned her beauty, her quiet commitment and singular achievements of unflagging devotion to God and God's people. She has been a loving sister to us. She supported us in our hopes and aspirations. Hers has been an *elegant* simplicity, an *inspiring* celebration of the ordinary.

We are confident that in Jean, another IHM, another woman of faith, another ally in our struggles for daily fidelity leads us forward. Jean concluded one of her brief autobiographies with a cheering message to all of us:

"I wish you all who shared with me your presence, example and love, helping me to grow in love for God, a big prayerful Thank You for being a part of my happy life."

To Jean we, in turn, offer our heartfelt thanks for her modeling of an ordinary,

simple, but elegant and inspiring life.

Written by Joan Glisky, IHM, October 2016  
Delivered by Nancy Ayotte, IHM, Jan. 17, 2022