

**May 16**  
**Sister Catherine Ann Healy**  
**(Sister Mary Noel)**  
**(1922-1994)**

Catherine Ann Healy was born on June 21, 1922 in Detroit, Michigan to Peter Jerome and Johanna McCaffery Healy. She grew up in a happy, secure home with loving, faith-filled parents and three brothers and a sister who, while they had their normal share of sibling squabbles, loved each other dearly. Her father was truly a self-made man, who had joined the navy at the tender age of sixteen, came home after serving his stint, and learned the heating and plumbing business. It wasn't long before he became the successful owner of his own business and able to provide for his family very comfortably. When the depression hit, like many others, he lost both business and home. Having to pull together to survive the losses and hardships of the depression drew the Healy family closer than ever together.

Taught by the IHMs for twelve years at St. Mary of Redford, Catherine Ann Healy in her senior year, wrestled with the question of what God wanted her to do with her life. The call to religious life was strong so it came as no surprise that on July 4, 1940 she entered St. Mary Postulate. For someone who loved to sing and whistle and talk, adjusting to the long hours of silence each day were very difficult but she trusted in the grace that had drawn her to this life and persevered. On January 2, 1941 she received the habit and the name, Sister Mary Noel.

Sister Mary Noel began her teaching career as a novice in 1942 with first and second graders at St. Joseph school in Monroe. From then until 1971 she taught every grade from first to twelfth, was directress at St. Mary Academy and at the Hall of the Divine Child, and was a teaching principal at St. Charles, Coldwater. She regarded as one of her most challenging and exciting teaching experiences her five year mission assignment in Puerto Rico. She found living and working with people of a different culture a growing experience in many ways.

After the passage of Proposal C in 1970 in Michigan resulting in the closing of many Catholic schools and the introduction of Open Placement in the community, Sister Catherine Ann became a pastoral associate at St. Ephrem's parish in Sterling Heights, Michigan, a ministry she served in for almost eight years. She grew to know and love the staff and people of a parish that also grew from 1500 families to close to 3000. She was deeply loved in return. A change in pastor at the end of these years who did not see her position as necessary forced her to resign after unsuccessful efforts to make it work. The next two years included one year as administrator of a Senior Citizen Retirement Home. At the suggestion of her Provincial she applied for a sabbatical year of renewal at the Washington Theological Union in Washington, D.C. which in her own words was "a year of spiritual, intellectual, cultural, and physical renewal; one never to be forgotten."

At the end of this enriching year, recharged on so many levels, Sister Catherine accepted a position as Pastoral Associate at a parish in Oklahoma City, far away from family and friends. There were many needs and some known problems in the parish but she felt she could help meet these needs. Unfortunately the problems were so great that every staff member either left voluntarily or

was terminated. This was like a death blow to someone who had anticipated success in the challenge of a new ministry. But as so frequently happens, when the Lord closes one door, he opens another. The opportunity to participate in the C.P.E. Program at the Presbyterian Hospital was offered and with it came the chance for in-depth reflection and self-evaluation. This experience in basic and advanced C.P.E. training, although painful at times, prepared her to move into her varied aspects of hospital ministry as Chaplain at St. Joseph Hospital in Ann Arbor. Here she worked for several years in the Rehabilitation Unit, Emergency, and Intensive Care Units. She was loved and respected by patients and staff alike for her caring pastoral ministering. A single example bears this out. One time during her training period as she was leaving a patient's room, he said to her, "Can I say something to you? You are in the right place and doing the right thing." This unexpected affirmation came at a time when she was struggling about the choice between hospital and parish ministry.

Kitty, as her friends fondly called her, knew her strengths and weaknesses. Her faith, deep commitment, and prayer life informed her entire life. She could acknowledge her gift of touching others with loving concern, warmth, and friendship and her ability of sacrificing her own needs for others. But she knew her limitations as well--impatience, perfection drives, over-zealousness, trying to be all things to all people and sometimes pushing herself to the point of physical exhaustion especially with the inroads her diabetes was making.

When the diabetes began to put more and more limitations on her ability to minister full time at the hospital, she knew it was time to move into part-time ministry. In July of 1993 she was warmly welcomed by Father Richard Perfetto as part-time Pastoral Associate at Resurrection parish in Canton, Michigan. On her Ministry Commitment form headed by the line from John's gospel, "I came that they may have life," she wrote that this was her hope that this "new, small parish may have life as it grew into a true faith community," and she looked forward to her own part in this formation: "I feel the challenge of return to ministry in this new community after over a year on medical leave."

But God had other ideas of "a new community." On May 8, 1994 her letter of resignation from active ministry at Resurrection Parish was printed in the parish bulletin. It was a difficult decision but her hope was that "the painful decision of leaving Resurrection [would] develop into a joyful decision of a new ministry of retirement." Eight days later, on May 16, 1994, she died in the hospital where she had ministered to so many others, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor. In a swift, clarion call to a new fullness of life, God had called her to her final home.

Sister Helen Oprysek