

Sisters of St. Francis

o f M a r y I m m a c u l a t e

Sister Martha Kienzler died on September 20, 2023. Many years before, in 1976, when she was working with Catholic Charities in Defiance, Ohio, Sister Martha wrote an article for the "Catholic Chronicle" about the faith and service of her namesake: Martha of the Gospel story in Luke 11:38-42. She described Martha as task-oriented with attention to persons, aware of being present to the person served rather than to the service itself. Later, when Martha's story continued in John 11:20-27, she was greeting Jesus as he approached the tomb of Lazarus. Here, Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me...he will never die." Martha affirmed her belief in this. Sister Martha ended her article by writing, "For me, Martha will be remembered...as a patron of service and belief—a woman of Faith, woman of Hope, sent to heal, sent to serve, sent to bring His Word to (all) in His Name." Today we can say that Sister Martha truly mirrored her own namesake.

Martha was born on the feast of St. Martha, July 29, 1936, to George and Clementine (Burger) Kienzler in Springfield, Illinois. She grew up in her family with a brother, George, and two sisters, Mary and Dolores. She attended SS Peter and Paul Grade School, Ursuline Academy, and Springfield Junior College (now Benedictine University) before leaving her home town to attend the College of St. Francis (now University) in Joliet where she received her Bachelor's degree in Sociology. After Martha, as Joliet Franciscan Sister Joris, professed her vows in 1961, she was sent to St. Raymond's in Joliet to teach the fourth grade. Two years later, she was on her way to Toledo, Ohio, to be a caseworker for Catholic Charities. For the next ten years, that work consumed and fulfilled her as, having reclaimed her baptismal name, she was Sister Martha...service-oriented and attending to people lovingly.

Alleluia!



Sister Martha Kienzler, OSF

It was also during those ten years that Martha continued her education, getting a Master of Theology degree at the College of St. Francis in Joliet in 1969 and a Master of Social Work degree at St. Louis University in Missouri in 1971. In 1973, she returned to Joliet to be a social worker at Guardian Angel Home for two years.

In the early '70s, Sister Martha saw a changing role for religious women in the Church. She said the essence was the same: witnessing by prayer and service to God's love. But she saw the expression of that role broadening and having greater variety. As the Joliet Franciscans were preparing for another Chapter (a once-every-four-years planning event), she felt the need to address this expanding role by looking at governing structure, life style, service, personal covenant within community, and unity in diversity.

In 1975, Sister Martha felt called back to the Toledo Diocese, this time to direct the branch of Catholic Charities in Defiance, Ohio. She did this work until 1981. Looking back on her ministry from 1963-1981, at the time of her Golden Jubilee in 2011, Sister Martha said, "As a clinical social worker my ministry became listening, affirming and consulting to guide

those overwhelmed by the stresses of life and relationships to experience positive self-esteem, their own human value and dignity, a sense of hope and the compassionate love of God.”

Martha was asked to be the Director of Initial Formation for the Joliet Franciscans from 1982-1984. This involved introducing young women to the community, guiding them as they explored their vocation and preparing them to live a life of religious vows.

Pastoral Ministry for Sacred Heart Parish in Muskegon Heights, Illinois, opened a new chapter for Martha in 1984. For the next five years, in addition to coordinating ministry to the sick, homebound and nursing homes, and training people for roles in liturgy or preparing people to receive sacraments, she applied her social work skills to counseling individuals, couples, the bereaved and caretakers. Rev. Louis Anderson, the pastor with whom she worked, said, “In all of her pursuits I found Martha to be caring, thorough, and attentive to the complete picture. She was consistently inviting shared pastoral reflection and welcomed observations or suggestions.”

In 1989, Martha became the Social Services Director for Our Lady of Angels in Joliet. She continued this work until 1996, when she again

returned to parish pastoral ministry, this time at Immaculate Conception Parish in Morris, Illinois, for twelve years. Of her experience in parish work, Martha said, “There was sadness to realize the stresses and injustice that individuals, families, neighborhoods had to endure, yet joy to observe and share the personal development and empowerment that could result from honest assessment, communication and new approaches.” Martha enjoyed the comradery of staffs and students and the growth of lay leadership in parish life.

When Martha returned to Our Lady of Angels, she became the sacristan for the Pastoral Care Department, tending to the chapel and its liturgical needs. But her ministry extended to caring for the residents in any way she could: companion (and sometimes driver) for medical appointments, feeding anyone who needed help, simply being present. When she moved to StoryPoint assisted living, she continued to be a sacristan for weekly Masses there.

To the end Sister Martha, like her namesake, served others. Now Jesus is telling her that he is the resurrection and anyone who believes in him will never die. Live on, dear Martha, in our hearts and in the presence of the Lord. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Sister Martha Kienzler, OSF

July 29, 1936—September 20, 2023

<i>Born:</i>	July 29, 1936
<i>Parents:</i>	George J. Kienzler and Clementine G. Burger
<i>Postulancy:</i>	January 25, 1959
<i>Novitiate:</i>	August 13, 1959
<i>First Profession:</i>	August 13, 1961
<i>Final Profession:</i>	August 13, 1966
<i>Entered New Life:</i>	September 20, 2023

Ministry History

1961-1963	Teacher: Juniorate, Grade 4, St. Raymond, Joliet, Illinois
1963-1970	Case Worker: Catholic Charities, Toledo, Ohio
1970-1973	Student: St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri
1973-1976	Social Worker/Director of Social Services: Guardian Angel Home, Joliet, Illinois
1976-1978	Director/Social Worker: Catholic Social Services of Defiance, Defiance, Ohio
1980-1981	Director/Instructor: Catholic Social Services Defiance College, Defiance
1981-1984	Intern/Director of Initial Formation: Novitiate, Guardian Angel Home, Joliet
1984-1989	Pastoral Ministry: Sacred Heart, Muskegon Heights, Michigan
1989-1992	Social Services: Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet
1992-1996	Director of Social Services: Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet
1996-2008	Pastoral Associate: Immaculate Conception Parish, Morris, Illinois
2008-2009	In Transition
2009-2010	Sacristan/Ecumenical Visitor: Pastoral Care Departments, Our Lady of Angels and Provena St. Joseph Medical Center, Joliet
2010-2015	Sacristan: Pastoral Care Department, Our Lady of Angels, Joliet
2015-2017	Volunteer Companion for medical appointments: Joliet
2017-2022	Volunteer Ministry, Joliet
2022-2023	Local Chapter Convener/Volunteer Ministry: Congregation, Joliet

<i>Interment:</i>	Section 8, Lot 341, Grave 4, Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, Illinois
<i>Predeceased by:</i>	Her parents, George J. Kienzler and Clementine G. Burger, her brother George (Vivian) Kienzler, her sisters Dolores (Robert) Pellman and Mary (Vernon) Schafer
<i>Survived by:</i>	Two generations of nieces, nephews, and many cherished friends and colleagues

Rest in Peace, Sister Martha!