

Sisters of St. Francis

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

Sister Mary Jo Young was so full of life! She stepped courageously into eternal life on September 27, 2023. Mary Jo was multi-talented, intelligent, friendly, talkative, caring and funny. She was a superb educator, mentor and organizer who loved to read, knit, teach, garden, travel, bake, sing, visit, and beat *Jeopardy* contestants at their own game. She loved God, her family, friends, community members and students. Mary Jo loved her life. When it threatened to be taken from her, she refused to describe the challenge of cancer as a "battle." "In battles there are winners and losers," she said. "I don't want to see it that way. I am on a journey with cancer, and I'll see where it leads and what I will learn along the way."

Mary Jo's journey through life began on November 28, 1943, in Blue Island, Illinois, when she was born to Eleanor (Okutowski) and Kenneth Young. One older brother helped to welcome her into life. Eventually, she became the big sister to seven more siblings. From a very funny father and a very patient mother, she learned humor, tolerance, dedication to work, strong faith, a sense of responsibility and enduring values. It was hard to leave her family when she felt called to the Joliet Franciscans, but she had an aunt and two cousins in the community and another joining her, so she was surrounded by family both in and out of the Congregation. When she became a postulant in 1961, Mary Jo embraced 24 classmates and quickly began to build lifelong friendships.

While in college, Mary Jo was a math major and hoped to teach math in high school. Her first assignment after graduation was to teach first graders. Surely there was some mistake! Mary

Alleluia!



Sister Mary Jo Young, OSF

Jo (by then, Sister Kenneth Mary) pleaded with Mother Borromeo to switch her assignment with the other math major in their class, who really wanted first grade. Her plea didn't work, and she felt bad for struggling with her first test of obedience. Embracing wherever the Spirit meant to lead her, Mary Jo went forward teaching primary grade children, pre-school and kindergarten, running a childcare program, eventually earning a doctorate in early childhood curriculum and women's studies so she could train others to do what she had been doing. Mary Jo found the niche meant for her all along and lived it with grace and talent.

After graduating with a B.A. from the College of St. Francis in Joliet in 1966, she went on to earn her M.Ed. in 1979 at the National College of Education in Evanston, Illinois, and Ph.D. in 1994 at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. During all those years, she continued to teach with great passion and with deep love for her students, showing them that learning was fun and exciting.

As a doctoral candidate, Mary Jo was living alone for the first time and didn't like it, so she quickly surrounded herself with friends. Two of them, a Malaysian-born Muslim and a life-

long Catholic taught mostly by Franciscans, interviewed her for a research paper. "The need for commitment ranked as a most important motive in her life. It came up time and again in the interviews," wrote Habibah Ashari and Teri Marche. Mary Jo, feeling the need to commit to something important and feeling "Jesus working in me" wanted to make a difference in people's lives, especially to those in need. "When things have happened, that was God giving me direction," she said. While teaching in a kindergarten in a poor area, Mary Jo got involved in public aid, food stamps and subsidized housing. She helped parents in their efforts to find jobs or seek aid. While running a childcare center, she loved seeing "dysfunctional" families get back on track and get jobs.

Sr. Mary Jo was named Professor Emerita by Elmhurst College in recognition of and gratitude for her many years of teaching. For over 20 years (since 2000), Mary Jo was an active member of the Board of the University of St. Francis in Joliet. She was their longest-serving Trustee. University President, Arvid Johnson, said, "She worked tirelessly to see that our meetings were productive, collegial, mission-driven, and student-focused...and that our social gatherings were fun and well-attended!"

Her many years of learning and educating were laced with all the other activities Mary Jo loved so much. She taught herself to knit, then never stopped making knitted clothing for friends and blankets for babies right up until very near her death. Her love for travel took her on adventures around the country and the world. Visiting with friends and family were top priorities as were her involvements in community activities, working on committees, singing in the choir, making others feel loved and important.

Sr. Mary Jo didn't want her earthly journey to end, but she prepared well for the inevitable. The cancer diagnosis came while she was on the planning committee for the Community's most recent Chapter of Affairs and Elections. She continued the work and insisted on being present for everything, arranging a chemo schedule around meeting dates. Though growing weaker, she bravely traveled to Brazil to say good bye to all of her Franciscan friends there. Last June, she hosted a dinner and evening of shared memories with classmates who knew she would not be with them to celebrate a 60th Jubilee next year. In July, she went to a final family reunion in Blue Island, which she had willed herself to live for. Two weeks before her death, Mary Jo welcomed the choir who would sing for her funeral to come to her home and sing with her. Jeanne, her companion, care-giver, and best friend to the end facilitated all of it.

Dearest Mary Jo, forever **young** in spirit... forever young in our hearts...as your journey takes you into eternal life, where God continues to lead you and where friends and family welcome you, know that all the people you have loved will someday be with you again. Amen! Alleluia!

Alleluia Letter written by Sr. Karen Berry

Sister Mary Jo Young, OSF
November 28, 1943—September 27, 2023

<i>Born:</i>	November 28, 1943
<i>Parents:</i>	Kenneth B. Young and Eleanor Okutowski
<i>Postulancy:</i>	September 6, 1961
<i>Novitiate:</i>	August 13, 1962
<i>First Profession:</i>	August 12, 1964
<i>Final Profession:</i>	December 19, 1972
<i>Entered New Life:</i>	September 27, 2023

Ministry History

1966-1968	Teacher: Grade 1, St. Cecilia, Columbus, Ohio
1968-1970	Teacher: Grade 1, St. Raymond Cathedral, Joliet, Illinois
1970-1972	Teacher: Grade 1, St. Ambrose, Joliet
1972-1973	Teacher: Grade 1, St. Andrew, Romeoville, Illinois
1973-1976	Teacher: Primary Grades, St. Andrew, Romeoville
1976-1979	Teacher: Preschool and Kindergarten, St. Jude, Joliet
1979-1983	Teacher: Kindergarten, Bishop Blanchette School, Joliet
1983-1984	Director of Childcare: Dr. King Education Center, Kankakee, Illinois
1990-1992	Student: Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
1992-1993	Student / Assistant Instructor: Indiana University, Bloomington
1994-2001	Assistant Professor: Early Childhood Education, Roosevelt University, Chicago, Illinois
2001-2002	Sabbatical
2003-2005	Assistant Professor, Elmhurst College, Elmhurst, Illinois / Director of Affiliates: Congregation, Joliet
2005-2007	Assistant Professor: Elmhurst College, Elmhurst
2007-2008	Assistant Professor: Elmhurst College, Elmhurst / Novice Minister: Congregation, Joliet
2008-2009	Assistant Professor: Elmhurst College, Elmhurst / Initial Formation Team Member: Congregation, Joliet
2009-2013	Assistant Professor: Elmhurst College, Elmhurst
2013-2018	Vocation Minister: Congregation, Joliet / Volunteer: DePaul Cristo Rey High School, Cincinnati, Ohio
2018-2021	Volunteer: DePaul Cristo Rey High School, Cincinnati, Ohio
2021-2023	Volunteer: Congregation, Joliet

<i>Interment:</i>	Section 8, Lot 329, Grave 6B, Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, Illinois
<i>Predeceased by:</i>	Her parents, Kenneth B. Young and Eleanor Okutowski, her brother, Paul Young, her sister-in-law, Therese Young and her nephew, Michael A. Byrnes
<i>Survived by:</i>	Her brothers, Kenneth (Helen) Young, Francis (Carol) Young, Anthony (Carol) Young, David Young; her sisters, Eleanor Breden, Therese Young, Gina Byrnes, and many nieces and nephews

Rest in Peace, Sister Mary Jo!