



**Sharing of Memories of Marie C. (Jane Frances) Fitzpatrick, BVM**  
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 10, 2021

**Father John Kasper, Friend**

Marie and I had a special bond. I am an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales. Her name when she first joined the BVM community was Jane Frances. Jane Frances de Chantal, with St. Francis de Sales founded the Visitation Sisters. They had a close spiritual relationship throughout their lives.

In 1980, the first year after I was ordained, I moved from western New York, the Niagara Frontier, to Colorado, the Western Frontier, with three other members of my religious order. The Diocese of Denver, at the time, was a rapidly growing area of the country with many people from the East and the Midwest moving there for work and new opportunities. In Denver, my fellow Oblates and I found a bishop and a diocese that were eager to implement a vision of parish life in conformity with the principles of the Second Vatican Council. Would that that spirit could continue today!

I was directed by the vicar general of the diocese to consider applying for the position of associate pastor at St. Michael the Archangel in Aurora, Colo. It was a newly established parish of about 200 families without any building except a model home next to the area of land designated for a new community center and, eventually, a church. For many months, we rented the local high school auditorium for Sunday morning Mass. The school was Smoky Hill High School, which I once mistakenly called Holy Smoke High School. That stuck! Well, I eagerly accepted the position and had the opportunity to become part of a dynamic Catholic community and a pastoral team that became a model for me of what contemporary collegial leadership in the Church could be.

Although Marie served there just a few years of her long and successful ministerial career, I want to mention the names of that pastoral team because each member and their families were dear to Marie as she was inspirational and dear to each one of us: the pastor, Father Robert Sirianni, a Denver native affectionately known as Bib; Kurt Bartley, director of youth ministry; Susan Lattick, parish liturgist; Jane Sanville, coordinator of RENEW and hospitality; Sister Bea White, minister of adult education; Mary Romaine, administrative assistant; along with community organizer Cindy Nisbeth; a large auxiliary staff; and myself as associate pastor.

Sister Marie Fitzpatrick was minister of sacramental preparation. Marie was older than most of us on the team. She brought a sense of wisdom and stability. Many of us were just beginning official ministry in the church and we counted on her guidance and experience as we planned programs, expanded ministries, and developed models of dialogue and service.

During the six years I served at St. Michael's, the parish population grew from 200 families to 2200 families. That experience of being church was unlike any I've ever experienced. With the encouragement of a wise and loving pastor, we endeavored to form a community built on the principles of collegiality, consensus, and subsidiarity.

There were many qualities that were the hallmarks of the parish and its ministries. I believe that three of those qualities were evident in Marie's life, which she helped to infuse into that amazing parish. Those three qualities were echoed in the opening prayer today.

**Personalism.** Marie connected with each person she encountered, expressing interest in, appreciating, and affirming each one of us, parishioners and staff alike.

**Joy.** Marie possessed a lighthearted spirit and brought a sense of fun and enjoyment to everything she did.

**Organization.** Marie was able to manage large numbers of people and detailed programs with ease because of her administrative skills, her vast experience, and her capacity for efficient and effective organization.

I am grateful to God that the beginning of my priestly ministry was shaped by a beautiful group of pastoral leaders, which included Marie Fitzpatrick. I carry her memory and spirit lovingly in my heart. I would like to close with a poem we used at St. Michael's to inspire our pastoral efforts. I've kept it with me these past 35 years. With Pope Francis's urgent call for the Church to return to a spirit of collegiality and synodality, I believe our efforts back then in the early 1980s are as important today as they ever were.

### Roundtabling

It will take some sawing to be roundtabled,  
some redefining and redesigning  
Such redoing and rebirthing of narrowlong Churching  
can painful be for peoples and tables

But so was the cross  
a painful hard time  
on a table of giving, a table of yes  
But from such death comes life,  
from dying came rising.  
So we search to roundtable church.

Roundtabling means being with,  
a part of,  
together,  
and one  
It means room for the Spirit  
and enabling gifts.

It is we in the present  
who are mixing and kneading the dough for the future  
from leaven past.

*(Adapted from "In Search of a Roundtable" by Chuck Lathrop.)*

Keep inspiring the church, Marie, from your lofty perspective, the church you served so faithfully, so long, and so well. Until we meet again, love and gratitude, dear friend.

### **Kathryn (Katie) Lynch, niece**

One of my most memorable experiences with Auntie Sister was when my parents, my siblings Marianne and John, and I went to visit her in Rapid City to celebrate her 25th anniversary as a BVM. At that time, she was working at the Our Lady of Perpetual Help School. This was her first time as a principal and she must have been very successful because she held the position for nine years. Many of her students were from the Lakota Tribe and lived on the reservation.

During that trip, she took us to many sights: the Badlands, Mount Rushmore, an old saloon in Deadwood, S.D. Yet the best was a visit to one of her friends on the reservation. I remember meeting her friends' teenagers and they were very friendly. They brought out a horse with no saddle, stirrup, or reins. They used a small set of steps to get up and on the horse. I had to hold on to the mane very tightly in order to stay on and then went for the ride of my life through the most stunningly beautiful hilly land with no fences. Such an amazing experience for someone from the city. She knew we would love it!

Auntie Sister loved South Dakota and Colorado. The terrain moved her soul and she spent 33 years living in what she referred to as the West. She loved the mountains, the culture, and the people. Her many wonderful traits were on display while living there, taking on new challenges, being open to new experiences, valuing education, and most of all investing in relationships. These were some of her many gifts. In many ways, they are her legacy. I believe she is hovering over the West revisiting the area she loved. Happy trails to you, Auntie Sister.

### **Maureen Murtaugh, cousin**

How does one condense a lifetime of wonderful memories into a few paragraphs? Marie Fitzpatrick was the firstborn child of Jack Fitzpatrick and his wife Annie, my grandmother's sister. The two sisters lived close to one another in Chicago and saw each other almost daily. My mother and Marie were first cousins but were as close as sisters. My mom was six years older than Marie.

As I grew up, my mother recounted one story after another about Marie. These memories were punctuated with references to Marie's amazing social skills and extroverted personality. She had more friends than anyone! Marie's decision to enter the convent at age 17 took my mother completely by surprise. Going from a life of car horns constantly honking downstairs to a life of prayer and devotion was a switch she didn't see coming. As it turned out, religious life agreed with Marie and she flourished. To my knowledge she never once regretted her decision.

In my high school years, the BVM travel restrictions were loosened and Marie was able to visit us more frequently. She didn't come alone. My memories include seeing her entourage pile out of cars in front of our house and start a game of baseball in our backyard. I watched in amazement at their energy and skill swinging that bat and dashing from base to base with their habits flying in the breeze. Other times I remember them piling into the house and breaking into song as my brother and his friend accompanied them with their guitars.

As I grew up, Marie was transferred to various cities. I was able to visit her in Rapid City and we even saw Mount Rushmore up close! In Colorado we took long drives up the Rocky Mountains to Georgetown—Marie with full energy while I struggled to stay awake from the altitude shock!

Marie simply loved conversation. She would choose it over shopping or other types of activity. By far her favorite topic involved her nieces and nephew. She would fill us in *ad infinitum* on every detail of their activities and news. She also took a great interest in my career and was very supportive. Marie's travels included a wonderful trip to Italy with my parents and Katie.

In later years, Marie returned to Chicago and spent much quality time with my mother. They would get together with a third cousin for lunch and conversation. That close bond lasted until my mom's passing 20 years ago. Until then Christmas Day was celebrated at our house. After that we would gather at Katie and Tom's. Needless to say, politics contributed to some lively conversations and perspectives! Marie brought much pride and joy to our family. She will always be remembered and can never be replaced.

### **Marge Lancor, niece**

Sister Marie Fitzpatrick was my aunt. I am the fourth child of her brother John and Bernice Fitzpatrick. One of my first memories of Auntie Sister was when I was little. My father would pick her up from the convent and another nun would come with as the companion. Dad would bring her to our house for dinner. Afterward, Dad would

always ask if anyone wanted to go for a ride. I volunteered many times to ride in the car with Dad and Auntie Sister. I remember sitting in between them on the way to the convent. I felt like not talking very much, but just listening, just listening.

Another childhood memory is of when we drove to South Dakota to celebrate Auntie Sister's Silver Jubilee. I absolutely loved this trip! Because we stayed at the convent, I had my own room. Think about it. Being part of a family with seven children, getting my own room was a *really* big deal! The other reason this trip is stored in my memory forever is because we went horseback riding in the Black Hills, we visited Mount Rushmore, and stopped at the famous Wall Drug store where I got a pair of moccasins.

As I grew I gathered many, many more recollections and conversations. Auntie Sister would come over to our house for various parties. She always took the time to ask me about school or work, and what was going on in my life. While I was talking away and telling her everything, she listened intently, asking questions. I would answer, just happy to have someone listen to me. In my younger years, I never asked her how *she* was doing. She just listened.

After I got married and had a family, I would call her more often. During these conversations, I would let her know the new things that were going on with myself, Roy, or the boys. Finally, I started asking her about *her* life—how was she doing, how she was feeling, her ministry. I also asked about the other sisters at the convent and we would talk about current events. This is when we really started building our relationship. This is when my connection with her flourished.

When she came back to Chicago to Wright Hall, Roy and I would visit on various Sundays. We would attend Mass, go to lunch, and then enjoy the company of the sisters. When Wright Hall was sold, I was very disappointed that she was moving to Dubuque, Iowa. When Roy and I visited her in Dubuque, we could see the history of the convent where she entered, the doors that she entered, where she met the sister who received her, how she loved living there among all of her friends. At the end of every visit, we would walk the halls visiting many rooms like the library or to view the bell in the stairwell, marvel at the beautiful woodwork in the beautiful building, and just be together. I also remember all the artwork and learning the history behind the many photo displayed on the walls.

Auntie Sister, thank you for your friendship. Thank you for having the patience to listen to me while I was growing up. I will treasure our wonderful conversations and your enthusiasm. But most of all, thank you for teaching me how to become a good listener.

#### **Peg O'Herron, cousin**

Sister Marie's mother and my grandmother were sisters, both born and raised in a small cottage in a very small village in Ireland. They made their way to America and raised families whose lives were intertwined. My branch of the family, the O'Herrons, loved the family gatherings with the Fitzpatricks. Marie was often a part of these, coming for her "home visits" from whatever ministry she was involved in. She had interesting stories to tell and tried to take an interest in each of us. In later years, we would see her at funerals and weddings and even some Irish parties! Marie was a lovely woman who enriched the lives of families and friends.

#### **Susan Anderson, Denver, Colo.**

I met Marie the first day of our master's program for counseling psychology. I thought she was regal and charming and, to my surprise, she was a real, live nun! I came to know Marie as a great representative of the Catholic Church and women religious. I appreciated her calm demeanor and open mind. We shared the joys and challenges of learning to be therapists. I will always treasure our friendship and I will miss her lovely graceful style and fun heart. Peace to her memory.

#### **Mary Kilgannon Abatemarco, former BVM and student**

Sister Mary Jane Frances was my first BVM sister in my first Catholic School, St. Thomas the Apostle, West Hempstead, N.Y. Our first lessons were in the basement of the church before the school was finally opened. There were 48 children in the class and I can only imagine how difficult it was to teach in that environment with all other classes in the same basement. The sisters wore the TV headgear but they were able to get all of us to listen and learn. I remember those rosary beads swinging around when all of us lined up to use the facilities. Everyone liked Sister Mary Jane Frances, so it was a treat to see her in the hallway as our school years progressed. I still sing a song she taught us – “How Much is That Doggie in the Window” – to my granddaughter and she will pass that on to her newborn baby brother.

During the summers when the sisters went back to Chicago to further their education, we were encouraged to write to her and she would always answer. This we did for many years and through sister’s influence, I became a member of the BVMs for four years. After leaving the community, I still kept in touch and was able to have a wonderful visit with sister at our set’s 50th reunion in 2014. I continued to keep in touch with her until she became ill. Sister had a great attitude and was happy to be a member of the BVMs. She taught me many lessons as a student and as an adult. May she rest in peace.

**Marie Fitzpatrick, BVM, (from her file)**

My grandparents, parents, and relatives had already experienced great deprivation of civil and religious rights under the tyranny of British rule, and many stories were passed down to me from the Irish as songs, and the exciting exploits of Irish patriots like Parnell, O’Connell and DeValera!

At the age of three I was taught to identify myself as “Marie Catherine Fitzpatrick and I am an Irish American!” My Irish heritage was not to be forgotten.