

# Reflection for Sister Nancy Jane Gerken, SC

August 18, 1935 – December 10, 2022



This evening Sister Dorothy Dolan and I, Sister Geri Marr, would like to reflect on the life of Sister Nancy Gerken as a Sister of Charity and a good friend. Both of us will share.

Sister Dorothy, DD, as Nancy and her family knew her in Nancy's early years in growing up and as I knew Sr. Nancy as a Sister of Charity. We will reflect on her life as our best friend.

First, I want to acknowledge Nancy's family and friends who are present. We all have come to celebrate Sister Nancy's adventurous life. Thank you for being here.

Sr. Dorothy will share her early friendship with Sr. Nancy.

## ***Sr. Geri:***

I met Sister Nancy, known as Sister John Bosco, at a picnic when two convents gathered for some outdoor picnic fun. Nancy loved to have fun and adventure.

As for ministry, Nancy was a primary teacher in the diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, Lafayette, LA, Greensburg, Pittsburgh and Archdiocese of Washington.

She worked as pastoral minister at St. John the Evangelist Parish in South Side, and St. Therese Parish, Munhall, PA.

She said her years in parish and social ministry were a dream come true.

She attended Fordham University 1979-80 to earn a Master's Degree in theology and pastoral ministry.

Sister Nancy completed 12 years as pastoral care coordinator at John XX111, in Hermitage, PA where she assisted residents to attend daily liturgies, conducted regular teaching session in spirituality, visited hospitalized and “in-home” residents, and assisted the dying and their families. Of her work with the people at John XX111, Sister Nancy says, “to be inspired to say the right words of consolation and hope is often a soul-stirring experience.”

During her life, Sr. Nancy attended many workshops, first education-related, then pastoral ministry oriented. She also served on several boards and committees. She was involved in the Charismatic Prayer Movement, attended local and national meetings and conferences. In the summer of 1989, she traveled to Israel to participate in the program sponsored by the National Educational Center for Holocaust Studies at Seton Hill University.

In 2011, Sister Nancy retired to the Motherhouse in Greensburg where she volunteered to help the Sisters. As a very talented artist, Sister Nancy painted and four of her paintings of Pittsburgh and Greensburg scenes hang at the beauty shop in Caritas Christi.

The nurses and residents on the second floor where Nancy lived comments that she was so joyful and pleasant and they enjoyed her singing her favorite songs as she walked along the hall. In the evening we would often join in singing together.

The Sisters of Charity are grateful to the Congregation’s nursing service and employees for their dedicated care of Sr. Nancy during her final years. They were so good to her. She loved them and they loved her.

Reflecting on Sr. Nancy’s life as a Sister of Charity, she remarked, “I am grateful to the Lord for my vocation to serve God’s people as a Sister of Charity. “

During my lifetime, I have been called to many different places and to various ministries. Through that work, I realize that “I can do all things in the Lord who strengthens me.”

Rest in peace, Sister Nancy Jane, Your loving and faithful God welcomes you home to be with your loving family and the Company of Charity. We love you and will miss you.

### ***Sr. Dorothy:***

Sister Nancy Gerken was born on August 18, 1935 to Leo Gerken and Agnes Neff Gerken. Nancy was the third child in a family of five: Her oldest brother was Jimmy (now deceased), her 2<sup>nd</sup> brother and best friend, is Donnie, her Sister, Joan, and the baby, Larry now also deceased. In addition to her parents, and the five children – Grandma Gerken and Uncle Bob also lived with them. Mrs. Gerken was a gentle pleasant and devoted mother. And as Nancy grew in wisdom and age she was very much like her mother, gentle, kind, caring. As the family grew it was quite clear the house on Glen Caladh St. was getting too small. So it was time to search for larger pastures. So at the end of seventh grade the Gerkens packed up left Hazelwood and St. Stephen Parish and School and moved to East Liberty and Sacred Heart Parish and School.

Before Nancy left I promised her that we would meet again when we both would attend Sacred Heart High School. But like so many dreams and promises we made—it never happened. Nancy did graduate from Sacred Heart, but I graduated from Elizabeth Seton, and our lives never touched again until 1969 when we were both Sisters of Charity missioned to what was once Cathedral School in Altoona. Three of the schools in Altoona were merged into one school and renamed McNelis Catholic. We lived there together for only one year. Nancy, being the kind person she was, saved my life by being willing to spend hours driving around the hills of Altoona with me practicing driving so I could get back and forth from Altoona to anywhere. At the end of that year Nancy was transferred and I continued driving around the hills of Altoona. And life went on until 2021 when we met again here at Caritas Christi, and I was lucky enough to spend some special time and memories once again with my friend, Nancy.