Sister Joyce Banks, OP
1930 – 2016

Sister Joyce Banks was born on March 22, 1930, in Chicago, to John and Agnes (Joyce) Banks. Her father was born in McDonald, Pennsylvania, and worked as a salesman. Her mother, a teacher, was born in Chicago. They were married in Visitation Parish in Chicago in 1922. Joyce and her younger sister Jean were their only children.

After attending St. Columbanus Grade School and Aquinas High School, Joyce said, “It is quite natural that I should choose to be a Dominican since I have been taught by them for twelve years.” She went on to say that she had been thinking about religious life for some time.

But the only thing that has kept me from [deciding] is not having the consent of my parents. It was difficult for them to make the decision, since I am the older of two children. Last Sunday we discussed my future, and while they will feel my leaving keenly, they see in my choice of life the will of God.

When it became known at Aquinas High School that Joyce was one of the graduates planning to enter, someone wrote this.

[She is] a rugged, wholesome child -- very likeable, who is too much the friend of everyone, and is usually in some scrape or other. [She] will be steady in her vocation, and will make a fine teacher.

Sister Joyce entered the postulate on June 26, 1948 at the age of seventeen. The following December she received her religious name, Sister Mary Cherubim, and began her novitiate year.

After making first profession on December 31, 1949, Joyce was assigned to teach at St. Patrick School in Escanaba, Michigan. During her four and a half years she taught all subjects to children in grades five through nine.

Her next assignment took her to Charlottesville, Virginia, where she taught and served as musician at Holy Comforter School from 1954 to 1961. Joyce had studied music before she entered and had nine years of piano and four years of cello. She continued her music studies at Siena Heights College in the summer and received her Bachelor of Music Degree in 1956.

In August 1961, Sister Joyce was assigned to teach at St. Mary Help of Christians School in Aiken, South Carolina. This school had recently replaced a private grammar school that closed. The Congregation staffed the school in 1955 to 1970. Sister Joyce taught seventh grade and served as music teacher at the school from August 1961 to
June 1963. Her next assignment took her to Guayama Puerto Rico where she taught at Colegio San Antonio for one year.

From 1964 to 1966, Sister Joyce taught at St Lawrence High School in Utica, Michigan. This was followed by seven years at Aquinas High School in Chicago, where, in addition to classroom teaching, she also directed the choral and orchestra and gave piano lessons. From Aquinas she joined the faculty at Montini High School in Lombard, Illinois, where she continued to teach from 1973 to 1979.

It was during those six years that Sister Joyce’s father died. His health had been declining since 1966 when he had a blood clot that Sister Joyce said “could cause a serious affect without warning.”

From 1979 to 1980, Sister Joyce served as of Director of Music in two grade schools: Holy Trinity in Westmont and Visitation in Elmhurst, Illinois. Her next position was at Immaculate Heart of Mary High School in Westchester, Illinois, where she served as Director of Music from 1980 to 1998.

Immaculate Heart of Mary was an all-girls high school administered by the IHM Sisters. Its neighbor, St. Joseph was an all-boys school under the direction of the Christian Brothers. In her annals, Sister Joyce described her ministry as “teaching music to high school students at Immaculate Heart of Mary H.S. and St. Joseph H.S.” She added, “[I also] teach Junior High music at Visitation Grade School in Elmhurst twice a week.”

In addition to classroom teaching, Sister Joyce planned and produced school concerts and musicals. In December 1995, her school chorus was selected to perform its Christmas program at City Hall in Chicago and at the Continental Cable TV. In her annals, she wrote, “As I get older, teaching is more tiring but I still love it!” Sister Joyce celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 1998 and wrote:

> After thirty-three years teaching High School Music, I decided that [was] enough. It was a difficult decision. I now will be with our nuns teaching music at Visitation, Elmhurst, IL— grade 1-8. Also, this is my Golden Jubilee and “celebration” is the name of the game.

Her last eight years of ministry were at Visitation Grade School in Elmhurst, where she taught music to children in grades kindergarten through eighth.

Sister Joyce retired from teaching in 2006 and lived in the Chicago area where she continued to prepare Mother’s Day baskets for seniors at Marillac House. She also helped with the Dominican Midwest Chapter Bazaars. In January 2016 she returned to Adrian, where she died on February 1, 2016 at the age of eighty-five and in the sixty-seventh year of her religious profession.

During the remembrance service, Sister Kathleen Klingen, Chapter Prioress of Dominican Midwest Mission Chapter, said,
Joyce’s prayer was one of gratitude always. She was grateful for family, friends, Adrian Sisters and for good health! She was a musician! She loved to sing and have children perform shows. Grade school age and high school age students from Virginia to South Carolina to Puerto Rico to Michigan and Illinois for fifty-six years loved singing and learning with Sister Mary Cherubim.

She had a wonderful sense of humor and could make any situation lighter. She had the gift for making others laugh and not take life so seriously. For example, in her 2008 annals Joyce wrote, “Oh, I found out I need to have a valve replacement. I pray it works out, but I won’t know until after these annals are collected. Next year, look to see if I have 2009 annals and then you will know how it worked out.”

Jennifer Griffin Chesney, daughter of Jean Banks Griffin, Joyce’s sister, sent an email regarding her remembrance of her aunt. Here is an excerpt of her message.

As a child I felt that I could just relate to Joyce like she was a big person version of who I wanted to be one day. She was the first to recognize my musical talent. I played piano fairly well but one summer at the age of fourteen, I suddenly had a voice. She was my first voice teacher and encouraged me to sing in the adult choir at our church, even though I was petrified at singing with the adults. My singing was good enough that I got into the Indiana University School of Music for my undergraduate degree. Then got a scholarship to get my Masters in Music at Yale University.

You all know Joyce as a sister. I know Joyce as my mentor, my role model, and most of all, as my musician and spiritual mother. And a special note for Helen [Therese Mayer, Sister Joyce’s long-time friend] – in my life there was never Joyce without Helen. I love you!

During the remembrance service, Sister Joan Mehney read the following remembrance from Sister Peter Anthony Schulte.

Joyce was teaching music for junior high classes at Visitation before I came there. Somehow she brought out the love for music in all the grades. I believe a big part of this was how she chose appropriate music for each class and age group. One of Joyce’s talents was her ability to tap into the music that appealed to each age group.

The boys especially could really get into the college’s fight songs. When necessary she would even write words to fit a favorite melody. Joyce wrote the Visitation Fight Song which was always sung before every pep rally.

It was obvious she loved music and it was passed on to her students. For many years she took groups to senior citizen complexes to entertain the residents. Her
Halloween, Christmas and Spring Concerts were always a hit both with the kids and their parents.

The readings¹ selected for the funeral liturgy called attention to the power of our life and love over death. In his opening prayer, Father Jim Hug, SJ, said,

Joyce’s spirit taught us about the humor of life and the music that pervades it, and helped us and all she touched to sing to you in love. We thank you for calling her to this Dominican community, for inspiring her to participate fully in its life, and for watching over her through her care for the poor and vulnerable to the end of her days.

As we listen to the words of the Gospel reminding us of the power of your life and love over death, deepen our trust that Joyce is rising too with Lazarus and Jesus into the fullness of your Life. Strengthen our confidence that we too will rise through death and be reunited in Your Love. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus and the communion of your Spirit, where we all are one with You and with Joyce, now and forever. Amen.

¹ Revelation 14: 12-13, John 11: 17-44
Left: Sister Joyce, seated, is shown with, standing, from left; Sisters Helen Therese Mayer, Anastasia McNichols, Jean Walter Hitzeman, and Joan Weithman

Left: Sister Joyce, left, at the steps of Holy Comforter Convent, Charlottesville, Virginia, with Sisters Marie Blanche Ferrigan and Mary Ann Zakajsek, 1954. Right: Sister Joyce shows that even Charlottesville, Virginia, gets snow in the Winter of 1954.
Left: Sister Joyce at her reception, December 1948.