Sister Jean Edward Selcke, OP
1915-2016

I have chosen you; you have not chosen Me.

Sister Jean Edward, baptized Violet Ellen Selcke, was born on March 6, 1915, in Chicago. She was the fourth of six children born to Edward and Mary (Heffernan) Selcke. Her three older brothers were Edward, Lawrence and Raymond. Six years after Violet’s birth, Lucile and Margaret were born.

In her autobiography, Sister Jean Edward wrote:

It was great fun having two sisters. We spent enjoyable time together visiting Garfield Park Conservatory, Riverview Park, the Chicago Civic Opera House and the Art Institute. Swimming and picnics were our favorites. Even though we spent time doing many pleasant things, my parents provided time for us to have piano lessons.

After attending first grade at St. Matthew School, she was transferred to Alfred Tennyson School, where she finished her elementary education. She attended John Marshall High School, took a four-year general science course, and graduated in June 1933. Her plan was to attend the University of Chicago but, as she wrote:

God had different plans for me. With His divine assistance I suddenly acquired a great desire to become a religious. I knew no religious or priests so when I expressed my desire to enter the convent to Sister Marie Magdalen Fleming, OP, she was surprised. Of course I did attend minimum religious instructions after school and received my First Holy Communion.

After accumulating my documents and postulant clothes, I entered on June 23, 1933, which was two weeks after high school graduation. Everybody and everything was new to me, but with God’s grace, I was able to do all things. Every day presented a new experience.

Sister Jean Edward made first profession on December 31, 1934, and on February 2, 1935, was assigned to teach at St. Lawrence Grade School in Detroit. This marked the beginning of her teaching ministry at ten parish schools from February 1935 to June 1969.

After teaching third grade at St. Lawrence for two years, she was assigned to teach primary grades at St. Joseph in Maybee, Michigan, for one year. Next was St. Alphonsus in Dearborn, Michigan, where she taught fourth grade for three years. This was followed with two years at St. Augustine and three years at St. Edward in Detroit.

She was scheduled for another year at St. Edward but, because her two sisters had asked Mother Gerald to send Sister Jean closer to home because their father was critically ill, she was reassigned
in August 1946 to St. Mary of Mount Carmel in Chicago, where she taught sixth grade until June 1951. Her family was grateful that she was able to visit her father frequently during his final year of life. He died October 1947.

In August 1951, Sister Jean Edward was assigned for eight years to teach fourth, fifth, and sixth grades at St. Gabriel School in Detroit. Summers during this period were spent studying at DePaul University, where she received her master’s degree in 1955.

Sister Jean Edward’s last ten years of teaching were in Illinois. She taught junior high students at St. Celestine in Elmwood Park for five years, St. Nicholas of Tolentine in Chicago for three years, and Visitation School in Elmhurst for two years.

In the 1970s, the Congregation initiated open placement, which replaced the system in which Sisters were assigned to specific ministries. During the wake service, Sister Bernice Olszewski’s remembrance was read. It describes Sister Jean’s first experience of searching for a job and adjusting to a new ministry.

I lived with Jean at St. James [Convent] in Maywood. I witnessed her immense courage when she was assigned to come to live at St. James but not teach in the school. She found a job in [Maywood Public Library]. She could not wear her habit and veil. She wore simple clothes and bought a wig to substitute for the veil. The library was within walking distance.

This time of transition was not easy for Jean. Nothing of the renewal changes was easy for her. Some of her experience in the community was difficult, especially being a teacher. It was truly a blessing when renewal happened with open placement and she was free to make other choices.

Sister Jean continued working at Maywood Public Library for eight years. She began as an assistant librarian and later served as catalogue typist. It was during this period that two members of her family died: her mother in 1970 and her brother Edward in 1977.

In 1978, Sister Jean relocated to Florida, where she continued to live and minister for the next twenty years. She served for two years as a live-in companion for a widow in Delray Beach until the widow returned to Michigan to live with her son. She then moved to Fort Lauderdale to assist another widow, until the widow required special nursing care.

Sister Jean then moved into St. Anthony Convent in Fort Lauderdale to explore other ministries. By September 1982 she was hired to serve as sacristan at St. Jude Cathedral in St. Petersburg. She continued this ministry for the next eight years.

In 1998, Sister Jean returned to Illinois and lived at St. Albert the Great Convent in Burbank. Her ministry there was one of prayer and presence. During the remembrance service, Sister Maria Goretti Browne, Vicaress of the Holy Rosary Mission Chapter, spoke about this period in Sister Jean’s life.
When the living quarters at St. Albert were going to be used for other purposes, Jean came home to Adrian in June 2005. She was still hale and hearty and loved to walk. Gradually her health declined and her memory failed. She loved to teach, even here at the DLC [Dominican Life Center], even after her memory left.

Sister Jean had a small stroke which made it difficult to eat or talk or even sometimes to smile. She was described by one of the chaplains a few years ago as “living a graced life and that she had a devotion to Mary and to chocolate.” For her 100th birthday most of her gifts were chocolate. It was also easy for her family and friends to give her chocolate.

Sister Jean Edward Selcke died on December 15, 2016, at the age of one hundred one and in the eighty-second year of her religious profession.

Sister Mary Keefe’s homily reflected the readings\(^1\) chosen for the funeral service. Here is an excerpt of her reflection on Matthew’s Gospel.

*The Good News here is that there is no checklist of good deeds to fill out. Jesus is talking about a manner of living, a life that’s driven by an authentic love. It’s a manner of life that recognizes that Christianity isn’t about us! It’s not about self-preservation, feeling good, or getting front row seats in Heaven.*

*It makes sense that Jesus gives us this lesson in the last week of his life. Being sheep of the shepherd isn’t about us. Nor is it about being saved, or getting rewards. Being sheep of the shepherd is about following our shepherd’s lead, and loving others as he has loved us.*

*I know Jean Edward through her good friend [Sister] Mary Kay Dolan and when I was asked to preach today the first thought that came to mind was, “Good and faithful servant.” This is what I know about Jean: she was faithful. She followed Jesus by caring for others in his name. I believe that, in the words of Paul, God has made Jean holy in spirit, soul, and body.*

*The God who is faithful to Jean has called her. Let us ask Jean Edward to help us to be as faithful as she was.*

Father Jim Hug, SJ, gave the following blessing during the funeral service.

*May God bless us all with a full and generous share in Jean’s:*  
Strong sense of God’s choice of her for mission. Amen, Alleluia!  
Life-long dedication to caring and skillful teaching of the young. Amen, Alleluia!  
Commitment to help children know they are loved by God. Amen, Alleluia!  
And faithful service of God in grateful love. Amen! Alleluia!

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\(^1\) 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24; Matthew 25: 31-40