Sister Joseph Eugene Fogarty, OP
1927-2017

For some time I have thought and prayed that I had a vocation to the religious life. With the advice of my spiritual director and confessor, I was introduced to Sister Alice Joseph and her faculty at St. Brendan’s. Their simplicity and naturalness overpowered me completely.

So begins the letter which twenty-two-year-old Mildred Fogarty of San Francisco wrote to Mother Gerald Barry in late 1949, asking to make application to join the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Mildred, who had just completed her California nursing exams, had been educated by the Sisters of St. Joseph in high school (Star of the Sea) and by the Sisters of Mercy at St. Mary’s College of Nursing, but as her letter indicates it was through her home parish, St. Brendan’s, that she got to know the Adrian Dominicans and knew which congregation she wished to enter.

Mildred Rita Fogarty was born December 18, 1927, in San Francisco to Clifton and Mildred (Ward) Fogarty. Clifton worked for the W.A. Grace Steamship Line and Mildred was a homemaker. The couple also had a son, Eugene.

When Mildred Rita was just ten years old, her mother died; when she was twelve, her father married Rose Margaret McGreevey, and by all accounts stepmother and stepdaughter developed a very close relationship.

Mildred Rita entered the Congregation on February 1, 1950, and became a novice that August, taking the religious name Sister Joseph Eugene. She made first profession on August 9, 1951. With her nurse’s training, it was only logical that her first appointment would be to one of the Congregation’s hospitals, and she was sent to Sisters Hospital, Santa Cruz, California.

According to an article in the July-September 2011 issue of Focus on Health, a publication of Dominican Hospital, while at Sisters Hospital, Sister Joseph Eugene

… performed duties you’d expect a nurse to do such as working in surgery, caring for patients on nursing floors and working in the emergency room. But in those days of more limited resources, necessity also demanded that Sr. Eugene [sic] take on other roles. She worked the switchboard during the plug-in phone days and prepared patient meals in the kitchen.

Sister Joseph Eugene went on to spend 25 years total at all three of the Congregation’s hospitals in Santa Cruz: Sisters, Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, and the facility built to replace those two, the new Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital (later called simply Dominican Hospital), where she was sent in 1968 not long after it opened. She also ministered for six and a half years, from 1960 to 1967, at Rose de Lima Hospital, the Congregation’s facility in Henderson, Nevada. For the 1967-68 school year, she was at Barry College (University) in Miami Shores, Florida, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with a sociology major. She later earned a Master of Public Administration degree from Pepperdine College in Malibu, California.

She left Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital in 1984 and began a new ministry at Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish in Santa Cruz: director of an outreach nursing program, STAR (Service, Teaching, Assessment and Resources available through the local community) Health Outreach Services, to
provide medically related services to the parish’s homebound and ensure they were being checked up on regularly and receiving Holy Communion. She later added a health screening component available to all parishioners.

At Sister Joseph Eugene’s wake service in Adrian, Sister Lorene Heck, Dominican West Chapter Prioress, quoted a comment from Sister Joseph Eugene, remembering that someone had asked early in the Star program’s life how it was going: “When I started I said I’d either sink or swim, and I’ve been paddling ever since.”

Sister Joseph Eugene also worked as outreach consultant at Dominican Oaks Assisted Living Residence and, in 1996, she and two other Adrian Dominicans at the hospital, her long-time housemate Sister Marie Michaealla Siplak and Sister Diana Marie Pellegrino, along with the hospital itself, helped develop a free health clinic in the county.

Sister Joseph Eugene retired in 2013 and continued to live in Aptos, California, with Sister Michaella. She died there unexpectedly on September 8, 2017, at the age of eighty-nine.

At the wake service, held September 28, Sister Lorene remembered her as a woman who “truly took to heart the corporal and spiritual acts of mercy,” who “for thirty-one years gifted the Santa Cruz community with loving compassion. In one of her annals, she wrote, ‘I always live what I preach – I hope.’”

She read to the gathered assembly part of a poem by Mary Oliver which had been a favorite of Joseph Eugene’s:

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\text{When it’s over, I don’t want to wonder}
\text{if I have made of my life something particular, and real.}
\text{I don’t want to find myself sighing and frightened,}
\text{or full of argument.}
\text{I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.}^{1}
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“Sister Joseph Eugene, compassionate healer, spiritual companion, light and joy, woman of God, you did not end up simply having visited this world,” she said in conclusion. “… May you be basking in the presence of total mystery revealed.”

Sister Maria Romero then read a reflection on Sister Joseph Eugene sent to Sister Michaella by Father Patrick Dooling, the former pastor at Our Lady Star of the Sea. Father Dooling shared a story about first meeting Sister Joseph Eugene when she cared for his father when he was a patient at Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, and then renewing ties with her when she came to Star of the Sea. In the note, he remembered her for her “faith, intelligence, wit, a kind of serenity that sustains. Sister Joseph Eugene gave us that during her life.”

The next day, Sister Carol Johannes, who entered the Congregation with Sister Joseph Eugene, preached the homily for the memorial Mass. She remembered that Sister Joseph Eugene was always assigned as her companion when Sister Carol’s family visited and “from the first moment they met her, absolutely loved her and would have felt deprived if she had not joined us. This was so much the case that when, years later, some of them went on a trip to California, they sought her out for a visit in Santa Cruz.”

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1 From “When Death Comes.”
… (I)t’s no wonder that the “Valiant Woman” reading from Proverbs¹ seems to me to be such an appropriate one for Joseph. …(S)cholars tell us it likely has reference to the description of Lady Wisdom in the Scriptural book of the same name. And it describes a woman who is solid gold good and wise, generous, warm, kind, gentle and always deeply compassionate toward those in her care, as was Joseph, always. And, lest she seem to sound a little too ethereal, she was also immensely practical and great fun to be with.

Referring to the Gospel reading, Sister Carol said:

We hear (Jesus) in the Word, we receive him in sacrament, and we see him in one another.

Most especially, we have seen him in our beloved Sister Joseph Eugene, for whom Jesus has now come to usher her home. She has been throughout her long and beautiful ministerial life, such a convincing image of Jesus. It strikes me that Jesus might well be saying to each of us here right now, ‘If you have seen Joseph, you have seen me, and you have seen God.’

¹ Proverbs 31:10-31, one of the Mass readings. The others were Romans 14:7-11 and John 14:1-10.
Standing in front of St. Rose de Lima Hospital, Henderson, Nevada, in the early 1960s are: back row, from left, Sisters Ellen Stephanie McNally, Robert Joseph Bailey, Vincent Maureen Dolan, Georganne Duggan, Joseph Eugene Fogarty, and Mary Jude Ludwig, and standing in front, from left, Sisters Marie Jane McGoldrick and Marie Daniel Lundy. Right: Members of the 1950 Dominican Hospital, Santa Cruz community are, from left, Sisters Daniel Therese Smith, Mary Noella Osentoski, Georganne Duggan, and Joseph Eugene Fogarty.
Left: From left, Sister Michaella Siplak; David Thayer; and Sisters Adrienne Piennette, Mary Patrick Ward, and Rita Eileen Dean.
Right: Sisters Anne Herringer and Joseph Eugene Fogarty

Members of the 2010 Diamond Jubilee crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Carol Johannes, Rina Cappellazzo, Joseph Eugene Fogarty, Barbara Hubbard, Mary Mackert, and Mary Louise Gass; middle row, from left, Sisters Joan Marconi, Diane Erbacher, Paul James Villemure, Charlotte Francis Moser, Mary Anthony Marelli, and Kathleen Sutherland; and front row, from left, Sisters Theodora McKennan, Mary Jo Sieg, Florence Marie Viaches, Michael Claire Wilson, Barbara Ann Mason, and Donna Markham (Prioress).