



Sister Molly Giller, OP 1938-2018

As Chapter Prioress and General Council member Molly was a servant leader. No matter the role, she was one with the others, bringing unity, clarity, common sense and competence. Time and again she had a remarkable ability to sense tension and, with patience and skill, to reconcile and unite groups.

That description of Sister Molly Giller, made at her wake service by Sister Mary Jane Lubinski, Prioress of the Adrian Crossroads Mission Chapter, sums up just some of the qualities that Sister Molly gave to the Congregation of which she was a part for almost sixty years.

Sister Molly was born on March 2, 1938, in Columbus, Ohio, and given the baptismal name Mary Elizabeth after her mother, Mary Elizabeth Cotter. Her father, Rowland Stanley Giller, was a native Welshman, while her mother was of Irish descent and came from Worthington, Ohio, just north of Columbus.

Sister Molly had two younger brothers, Ron and Michael, and a younger sister, Maureen. Little is known of life in the Giller household in those days, save for an intriguing tidbit composed by Maureen at some point, which Sister Mary Jane read at the wake service:

Dear Molly, I didn't much care for you when I was a little kid! We probably would have gotten along much better had you not broken my arm. ... Unfortunately, things didn't get much better once we both hit St. Ursula Academy. If you really cared about me you would have made a sincere effort NOT to be so good at everything. You could carry a tune, spike a volleyball, win an election, get good grades, volunteer for everything and be chosen "most popular." I mean, really!

At some point early in Sister Molly's life, the family moved to Cincinnati, where Rowland worked as an exterminator. As noted in Maureen's writing, the girls attended high school at St. Ursula Academy there. Sister Molly graduated in June 1956 and went on to Ohio State University for one year, at which point she went to work as a teacher at St. James Parish school in Wyoming, Ohio, near Cincinnati.

It is unknown how a young woman who lived her early years in Columbus, went to an Ursuline high school, attended a church (Nativity) where the Sisters of Mercy staffed the school, and worked at a school run by the Sisters of Notre Dame, was attracted specifically to the Adrian Dominicans. Sister Jeanne O'Laughlin, who was part of the Adrian Dominican Independent School System (ADISS) board with Molly, recalled after Sister Molly's passing that the connection came via Sister Molly's mother, who was acquainted in some way with Adrian Dominican Sisters who taught in Cleveland.

Whatever the impetus was, the fact is that on May 30, 1959, just completing her second year of teaching, a twenty-one-year-old Mary Elizabeth Giller, known to all as Molly, wrote to Mother Gerald Barry requesting admittance to the Congregation.

She entered on September 8 of that year and, with her expertise as an educator and the high demand for teachers, was immediately sent out to the classroom. She spent the 1959-60 school year

at St. Jude's in St. Petersburg, Florida. In August 1960, she was received into the novitiate, with the religious name Sister Michael Maureen after two of her siblings.

After completing her canonical novitiate year in August 1961, Sister Molly was missioned to Sacred Heart Parish in Caro, Michigan, to teach elementary school. She spent four years there, followed by three years at Blessed Sacrament in Davison, Michigan. It was in July 1966, during her time there, that her father died unexpectedly at the age of just fifty-six. A month later, Sister Molly made final profession in the Congregation.

In August 1968, she completed her bachelor's degree in English at Siena Heights College (University), and immediately thereafter was sent to be a teacher and principal at Holy Angels in Sturgis, Michigan, where she spent the next four years. At that point, in August 1972, she returned to the Cincinnati area to become a reading consultant for the nearby Mount Healthy school district.

Sister Molly completed a master's degree in school administration and supervision at Cincinnati University in 1973 and, later that year, became assistant superintendent of ADISS. She rose to superintendent the next year.

After five years with ADISS, she became a doctoral student at the University of San Francisco and then, after a year there, she went to work for the Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon, as its vicar of education while completing her Doctor of Education degree in organization and leadership, which she did in May 1989. According to her 1979-1980 annals, she was the first woman in the U.S. to be appointed a vicar of education.

She spent eleven years in that job, during which time she earned a number of accolades. Among them were being chosen Executive Officer of the Year by the National Association of Boards of Education in 1985 and two honors for her outstanding contributions to Catholic education: the John F. Kennedy Certificate of Recognition from the Knights of Columbus in 1988 and the Clifford Campbell Award from the archdiocese in 1990.

In 1990, she went to the Diocese of Boise, Idaho, to work as an education consultant. She only spent one year there (although she continued on in a consultancy role) before a leadership role in the Congregation came her way; in 1991, she was elected Chapter Prioress of the Pacific West Chapter, headquartered in Santa Cruz, California.

She was only halfway through a sabbatical year at the end of her term when the Congregation's Fifteenth General Chapter convened at the end of December 1997. During the Chapter, she was elected to the General Council in the post of Vicareess, effective July 1, 1998.

The Council's tenure fell during a very busy time in Congregational history, including the major assembly which came to be known as the Gathering, in 2002, and the merger with the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds, Washington, in 2003. Also during this time, Holy Rosary Chapel and Weber Center underwent renovations and construction began on St. Catherine Chapel.

For Sister Molly, her time in office was also tinged with sorrow when her mother, with whom she was very close, died in 2001. And even though she was the oldest of the Giller children, Sister Molly outlived all three of her siblings; Michael died in 2005, Maureen died in 2010, and Ron died in 2017.

The last ministry of Sister Molly's life came after her term on the Council ended in 2004. In 2005, she became director of the RCIA at St. Mary of Good Counsel Church in Adrian, a ministry she carried out for the next eight years.

"I have been blessed to experience the growth in faith and spirituality and love of God in these catechumens/candidates as well as sponsors, team and myself," she wrote in her 2007-08 annals.

In 2013, facing some health issues and continuing decline in her vision and hearing, Sister Molly resigned her job at St. Mary's and a few months thereafter moved into the Dominican Life Center. She continued to be as active as possible until very close to her death, which came on February 5, 2018, less than a month before she would have turned eighty years of age.

Among those who spoke at her wake service were Sister Kathleen Schanz, who recounted the time in late 1996 when she was ready to start her final chemotherapy session and Sister Molly invited her to Santa Cruz for some R&R before the treatment. Sister Kathleen wanted to visit Grace Cathedral in San Francisco to walk its famous labyrinth, and Sister Molly, "a most gracious and hospitable host," drove her there despite storms and mudslides that closed the main road to San Francisco. They walked the labyrinth together, and "it was a powerful meditation for both of us," Sister Kathleen said.

Brenda Sparkman, who came to St. Mary of Good Counsel in 2008 as director of faith formation, recalled the first time she met Sister Molly and was intimidated by the tall, impeccably dressed, confident Adrian Dominican Sister. "But I soon discovered that I didn't need to be," she said. "Molly had a way of making you feel that you could be completely yourself."

She remembered Sister Molly as a personal mentor as they oversaw faith formation together, Brenda for the children and Sister Molly for the adults. And over the years, they became very close friends, and remained so after Sister Molly left the parish.

"Molly, my dear, dear friend," she said in conclusion, "I will miss you every day of my life. I believe you can hear me, and that you can see me with 20/20 vision, and I'll try to live my life by your example – to speak my truth, to laugh, to serve others, and to appreciate and feel blessed for every day that we have."

At the next day's funeral Mass, Sister Katie McGrail, who served on the General Council with Sister Molly, described her as "an educator to the hilt and she loved it. That was her home base, where she always landed, whatever the specifics of the ministry, right up to her last active ministry at St. Mary's."

Sister Katie shared memories of their time on the Council together and connected the stories that had been shared about Sister Molly the night before to the Mass's readings, from Ephesians 3 and John 15.

As I read these passages over this week, they are like tender, mystical love letters to us. A love that calls us to bear fruit. That is certainly what we heard in the stories of Molly's life last evening.

... May our celebration rise to heaven where Molly now stands, once again whole and at peace, embraced by her family, before the loving face of God.



Left: Sister Molly Giller, left, with Sister Donna Markham



Left: From left, Sisters Maureen Comer, Molly Giller, and Anne Cenci attend Gathering 2002. Right: Sister Molly with her friend Mary F. Reardon, December 2016



Left: Members of the 1998-2004 General Council are, from left: Sister Janet Capone, OP, Prioress, and Sisters Maureen Comer, Molly Giller, Barbara Rund, and Kathleen McGrail. Right: Sister Molly in Ireland, 2005



Left: From left, Sisters Patricia Siemen, Julie Hyer, and Molly Giller celebrate the 50th anniversary of Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz, California, 1992. Right: The Giller children, from left, Maureen, Michael, Ron, and Molly, 1943



Left: From left, Sisters Heather Stiverson, Mary Soher, Molly Giller, and Rose Celeste O'Connell



Members of the 2010 Golden Jubilee Holy Angels crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Kathleen Walli, Kathleen Voss, Mary Katherine Drouin, Molly Giller, Helene Kloss, and Monica Charles Stankus, and front row, from left, Sisters Marie Carleen Maly, Annice Mordenski, Jamie Phelps, Mary Ann Dixon, Maurine Barzantni, Mary Carr, and Donna Markham (Prioress).