In an extensive autobiography written as a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) requirement, Sister Jeanne remembered her childhood as a happy one and that she was always aware of her parents’ love even though they were not especially demonstrative in their affection. She said she could only recall being spanked twice: once when three of them were jumping on a bed and broke it, and once when she ate her sister’s Valentine cinnamon hearts.

Faith was part and parcel of daily life, and she cited her father as one of the two most significant spiritual models in her life (the other being her priest, Monsignor William McMillan). “My image of God is very much influenced by my Dad,” she wrote. “I loved my Dad, he loved me, he understood me, and I knew that he would always forgive me.”

Sister Jeanne attended kindergarten and grade school at St. Peter’s in Rockford, and said that her early school years were not especially positive. “Learning to read was difficult for me and math was a drag,” she wrote.

High school was a much better time for her than grade school had been. She attended Muldoon High School, which was operated by the Adrian Dominican Sisters, and began to find meaning in her studies at that point. Still, she wrote, she was not drawn at all to the Sisters who taught at Muldoon, even avoiding being friendly with them (and because she and her friends were considered “anti-establishment,” they were not too popular with the Sisters either, she said). It all made her call to Adrian “even more of a mystery.”

World War II brought many changes to the Burns family. Sister Jeanne started high school in 1943 and right away began working part-time, as did most of her friends. “This was needed and also was the thing to do during World War II,” she wrote. Three brothers had been drafted, and a sister and brother-in-law and their children moved in with the family to help out. But Joe, the brother-in-law, died very suddenly just before the Christmas of Jeanne’s freshman year, at the age of just thirty-two. Jeanne loved and admired him greatly, and his death was a profound loss for her.

Sister Jeanne’s high school years were taken up with friends, dating, and an array of social activities. During her senior year she took steps to register for nurse’s training, but rather abruptly that March – at Mass at Muldoon on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph, to be precise – she felt a call to religious life instead. Despite her lack of connection with the Sisters at Muldoon, “there was no doubt that I would be an Adrian Dominican,” she wrote. “… Vocation is indeed a mystery.”
She arrived in Adrian on June 22, 1947, and began her canonical novitiate year that December, receiving the novice’s habit and her religious name, Sister Thomas Raymond – her father’s name as well as that of two major Dominican saints.

Once her novitiate year was completed in December 1948, she remained in Adrian to continue her studies at Siena Heights College (University), and in August 1949 was missioned to Assumption School in Jacksonville, Florida, while continuing her undergraduate work at Barry College (University) in Miami Shores. She completed her bachelor’s degree in history at Barry in 1954.

Sister Jeanne stayed in Jacksonville for eight years, teaching fourth through sixth grades. “My first couple of years teaching are a blank, but I can remember getting to feel pretty good at it after about three years,” she wrote. “I liked teaching and I had the feeling that the kids liked me and I established a reasonably good rapport with the parents. It was a good feeling to know what I was doing and to feel good about it.”

Her next three assignments came in quick succession: St. Patrick High School, Miami Beach, Florida (1957-58), during which time she completed her Master of Education degree from the University of Florida-Gainesville; St. Joseph School, Bronxville, New York (August-November 1958); and Hoban Dominican High School, Cleveland, Ohio (the remainder of the 1958-59 school year). She was then appointed principal of St. James School in Miami, an experience which she greatly enjoyed. “I will always have a soft spot in my heart for St. James School and the people there,” she wrote.

Sister Jeanne was at St. James from 1959 to 1965, at which point she was appointed to teach and be an administrator at the Congregation’s Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida. Not only did this first experience with an administrative team show her a whole new mode of leadership, but it coincided with the early years of the Congregation’s Renewal time.

“These years in West Palm Beach were ‘break-through years’ in many ways,” she wrote. “The impact of Vatican II was just beginning to filter through the Adrian Dominican organization. I was very conscious of wanting to participate in the renewal of our Congregation.”

She soon got her wish. In December 1967 she was appointed to go to Adrian and begin preparations for the Chapter of Renewal, and she was elected as a provincial delegate to the Chapter. When the Chapter convened in 1968, she was elected to the General Council, to serve as Vicaress alongside Sisters Rosemary Ferguson, the Prioress; Mary Therese McCarthy; Noreen McKeough; and Dorothy Folliard. Then, at the next General Chapter held in 1974, Sister Rosemary was re-elected as was Sister Jeanne, again as Vicaress. Together, the two served ten years in office.

“Our relationship during these ten years has been a special gift for me,” Sister Jeanne wrote of Sister Rosemary. “The level of trust and love between us has been constant and strong. We have been a good complement, I believe. Perhaps, overly simplifying, I would say she was the charismatic dimension and I was the administrative dimension of our team.”

When Sister Jeanne’s second term on the Council was up in 1978, she was eager to embark on a new ministry. She had earned a second Master of Education degree, this time in guidance and counseling, from Siena Heights in 1977, and the four years she spent serving on the boards of the Congregation’s two hospitals during her time on the Council rekindled her high school-aged desire to work in a health care setting. This time, that desire led her to enroll in CPE training at Aquinas Institute of Theology in Dubuque, Iowa, and to become certified as a hospital chaplain.
She spent the rest of her life in active ministry working in hospitals, first at Rochester (Minnesota) Methodist Hospital as a chaplain (1979-80), then at St. Vincent Hospital and Medical Center in Toledo, Ohio, as Director of Pastoral Care (1980-86) and finally at Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital in Santa Cruz, California, where she was Pastoral Care Coordinator from 1986 to 1989, Vice President of Mission Effectiveness from 1989 to 2000, and in patient relations from 2000 to 2004.

Health challenges necessitated her return to Adrian in 2013 to live at the Dominican Life Center, where by chance her room was right next to Sister Rosemary Ferguson’s and just down the hall from Sister Cathryn Deutsch, with whom she had served on the Council from 1974 to 1978, and from Sister Mary Margaret (“Sis”) Beh. Jeanne, “Sis,” and Sister Veronica Kelley had lived in community in Santa Cruz and had remained close friends. “One of Jeanne’s goals in Adrian was to help those from the West feel at home here,” said Sister Joanne Peters, Co-Chapter Prioress of the Holy Rosary Chapter, in her eulogy at Sister Jeanne’s wake service.

Sister Jeanne died on July 18, 2019, aged ninety. She was in the seventy-first year of her religious profession.

Sister Maureen Comer, in her homily for Sister Jeanne’s funeral Mass, reflected upon the readings Sister Jeanne had chosen: 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:7 and Luke 15:11-32. “When I learned that Jeanne named me to reflect on the readings she chose, I was struck with how those readings were so Jeanne,” she said. The passage from Corinthians, Paul’s famous description of love as “the way that is better,” “would catch Jeanne’s attention for she was always seeing to explore new concepts, to apply new learning to her life.” And Sister Jeanne, she said “lived her life driven by love. However, if we stopped with this reading, we would be missing a significant piece of who Jeanne is. We would not have the whole picture. And she did go on to choose another reading – the parable of the prodigal son.”

Luke, Maureen continued, refers to the prodigal son as “coming to his senses.” “Coming to your senses would be very important for Jeanne,” she said. “Trust me, I know – I was her assistant for three years when she was the Vicaress/Congregation Administrator and my mentor and friend for fifty years. She would see being sensible as important.

…What a gift Sister Thomas Raymond/Jeanne Burns gave us in these readings as they so reflect her life. A woman of eloquence, style, always a teacher. This woman and these readings remind us of the grace of accepting the love of our gracious God – unending, no strings attached. How blessed we are, those of us who call Jeanne sister, aunt, colleague, friend and mentor. We are indeed blessed persons. Because as Paul and the prodigal son have taught us through their words, and as Jeanne taught us through her life, there are three things that remain: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.
From left: Sister Jeanne as a flower girl, 1935. Sister Jeanne enjoys her time at the beach in Miami, Florida, December 7, 1932. Sister Jeanne stands in front of the grotto at the Motherhouse on her entrance day.

From left: Sister Jeanne with her parents. Sister Jeanne as a postulant – 1947
From left: Adrian Dominican Generalate Officers from 1968 to 1974 were: front row, from left, Sister Thomas Raymond (Jeanne Burns); Mother Laurence Edward (Rosemary Ferguson), Mother General; and Sister Mary Paul (Noreen McKeough); and back row, from left, Sisters James Therese (Arthemise Cassanova), Mary Julita (Mary DeVault), Christopher (Kathryn Noonan), John Bride (Mary Catherine Jordan), and Margaret Michaella (Dorothy Folliard). From left, Sisters Veronica Kelley, Jeanne Burns, and Mary Margaret Beh celebrate Sister Jeanne’s Golden Jubilee, 1997.

Members of the 1974-1978 General Council were, from left, Sisters Rosemary Ferguson, OP, Prioress General; Cathryn Deutsch, OP, Councilor; Jeanne Burns, OP, Vicarress General; Nadine Foley, OP, Councilor; and Jeanne O’Laughlin, OP, Councilor.
From left: Sisters Dorothy Glaister, left, and Jeanne Burns. Members of Sister Jeanne’s mission group are: front row, Sisters Diana Miller, Anne Russell, and Julie Hyer, and back row, Sisters Hilda Marie Gelegan, Adrienne Piennette, Jeanne Burns, and Molly Giller and Associate Mary Reardon.

Right: Sister Jeanne, left, and Sister Mary Margaret Beh volunteer at St. Francis Soup Kitchen, 2011.
Right: Former members of the General Council gather for a 2006 reunion, from left: Sisters Dorothy Folliard, Rosemary Ferguson, Mary DeVault, Jeanne Burns, and Noreen McKeough.

Members of the 1997 Golden Jubilee Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Cyrilla Zarek, Margaret Lane, Jean Kathleen Comiskey, Marcine Klemm, Kathleen Therese McCann, Paul Emilia Brown, Shirley Thielk, and Bernadette Mehal; middle row, from left, Sisters Jacquelyn Murray, Theresa Nightingale, Mary Saynay, M. Joan Loeffler, Ann Stephanie Callopy, Janet Persyk, and Margaret Ann Swallow; and front row, seated, Sisters Jeanne Burns, Mary Skender, and Benita Bourne.