

Sister Dympna Kelly

21st April 1925 --- 18th May 2024



Sister Dympna was the first of seven children born to her parents, Michael and Anne Kelly, in Knocknahilla, Co Clare, Ireland on 21st April 1925. Born into a loving, faith-filled home which shaped her gentle spirit and instilled in her a deep faith, it guided her throughout her life. She received her Early Years education at the local Primary School in Mullagh and then attended the Dominican Convent School in Cabra, Dublin for her Secondary Education.

She entered the Marist Novitiate in Carrick-on-Shannon in 1943 and following her first profession in 1945, joined the community of Ottery Saint Mary in Devon, England. Professional Teaching Training at Digby Stuart College of Education, London, followed. Her ministry in Education was very important to Dympna and in the years that followed, she exercised this ministry initially as a class teacher and subsequently in leadership roles as Deputy or Headteacher. This work took her to our three areas of mission in Devon - Ottery, Paignton and Barnstaple where she gave of herself wholeheartedly to pupils, families and staff alike. She was a pioneering member of the group of sisters who took up teaching roles at St. Joseph's School in Nechells, an area of huge deprivation, crime and poverty in Birmingham. This mission was very dear to Dympna's heart – there she truly met the God of the poor in the young families she encountered each day and she responded with energy and love. Her joy was to support them with compassion, patience and practical advice – a commodity which Dympna possessed in abundance!

Being at the service of 'The Work of Mary' with a keen readiness *'to go'* where the need was greatest and as requested, was very important to Dympna. The Congregation, at the service of the Gospel, always came first. She was very faithful to 'The Marist Way', our lay Marists in England and enjoyed arranging regular meetings in various communities where she lived, keeping in touch with old members and recruiting new ones – this was a source of great joy for her.

She retired from Teaching in 1987 and then benefitted from a well-earned Sabbatical Year during which she refreshed and renewed herself spiritually and physically for what was to be *'her life of service continued along new paths'*! Thus, we find her, in community leadership roles; the ministry of parish sister in White City, London; service at Our Lady's Shrine in Walsingham; housekeeping at the General House in Via Aurelia and director of the Retreat Centre in Nympsfield and as an active member of the Sunninghill community with outreach to the local nursing home.

Dympna, entered wholeheartedly into whatever ministry was entrusted to her. She touched many lives with her quiet strength, her sense of justice and unwavering compassion. She was there for those who needed her a listening ear, sound advice.

She had a remarkable ability to offer guidance in a way that was practicable and compassionate, leaving a lasting impression on all who sought her advice.

With the onset of ageing and accompanying infirmities, Dympna transferred to Villa Maria in 2017. Here she once more entered fully into the life of the community; never missing a community function; interested in all that going on and making a valuable contribution to the gathering. She was a person who found joy in helping others; she believed in the power of faith and compassion.

While she didn't gladly embrace the limitations of ageing and increasing frailty, she came to accept them. Her independence was very important to her and she held on to it for as long as she could – then she gratefully accepted the support she needed from the devoted carers here in Villa Maria.

Throughout the last week of her life, she knew she becoming increasingly weaker. Over those days she connected with a number of friends who regularly communicated with her; in particular her only surviving sibling, Sister Brenda Mary OP. She took time to chat with the carers and to thank them for their care of her as well as to the sisters who popped in and out throughout the day.

Two weeks previously she had spoken of her funeral and her desire that the story of Cana, featured in the Readings. *'Mary, the mother of Jesus was there'* and *'do whatever he tells us'*. For Dympna – this spelt out what it is to be 'Marist'.

She was confined to her room for just two days before she slipped away gently and peacefully on the evening of 17th May. Rest now dear Dympna in the peace and love of our triune God whom you served so well.

