SISTER JANE ROBERT STUCKEL, OP
1934 – 2022

At 8:30 a.m. on February 4, 1934, Jean Annette Stuckel came into the world at St. Joseph Hospital in Joliet, Illinois. Fifteen minutes later, Jean's twin sister, Jane Bernadette, was born … to the complete surprise of her mother and the doctor, because in those days, there were no tests to determine whether a mother was going to have multiple babies.

Jean and Jane joined their brother Robert, who was fifteen years older, and their sister Collette, five years older, as the children of John and Gertrude (Miller) Stuckel. At the time the twins were born John owned a large butter and eggs business, only to lose it in the Great Depression. When World War II broke out he became a supervisor at a large ammunition plant that had been built in Joliet, and after the war he became a liquor distributor. Gertrude was a skilled seamstress who made all of the children's clothes throughout the Depression, and even afterward enjoyed making special outfits for them, especially the girls' formal dresses for school dances. In later years, she became the costume designer for the St. Francis Children's Theater in Joliet, a job she held for twenty-five years.

The children all attended St. Patrick School in Joliet, and it was here that Jean and her twin both discovered their affinity for the Adrian Dominicans who staffed the school. When the family moved to a new house next door to the convent, Jean was excited to discover that from her bedroom window she could look right into the refectory and recreation room, and "I was fascinated with what I saw and heard," she wrote in her autobiography.

> *In the summertime, with the windows opened, I saw and heard lots of laughter and birthday parties and dinner times and evening recreation. This was all so fascinating to me and the more I watched, the more I wanted to be there with them. Usually Sisters receive their vocations through prayer. I firmly believe I received my vocation through "spying."*

When it came time for high school, Jean wanted to attend Mount St. Mary Academy in St. Charles, Illinois, in order to continue having Adrian Dominicans as her teachers. She loved her high school experience and excelled in her classes, and at the end of her junior year in June 1951, with her parents' complete support, she entered the Congregation. Jane followed seven months later but left due to health issues

fifteen years after that. The twins took each other's first names in religious life; Jean became Sister Jane Robert and Jane became Sister Jean Robert.

After completing her canonical novitiate year in December 1952, Sister Jane Robert was sent to St. Scholastica School in Detroit, and finished out that school year plus the next one there. She wrote in her autobiography that she — diminutive in stature at just four feet eleven inches — went to St. Scholastica to replace Sister Maureen Fay, who was more than a foot taller, and the first time she met her students, the children all stared at her until one little boy finally shouted, "You're so short!"

Subsequent assignments took her to Our Lady of Loretto School, Hometown, Illinois (1954-1963); St. Vincent de Paul School, Fort Wayne, Indiana (1963-1964); St. Brendan School, San Francisco, California (1964-1968); and St. Peter School, Henderson, Nevada (1968-1969). She completed her bachelor's degree in English from Siena Heights College (University) in 1958, to be followed in 1972 by a Master of Education degree and Reading Specialist certification at Holy Names College, Oakland, California. During her time in Hometown, San Francisco, and Henderson, she not only taught school but held demonstration workshops for other elementary teachers.

Most of the rest of her years in education were spent on the administrative level. She was appointed principal at St. Daniel the Prophet School in Scottsdale, Arizona, for a year (1969-1970), and then at St. Francis de Sales School in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she stayed for a total of eleven years from 1970 to 1981. For the first six years of that time, at the appointment of the bishop, she also served as associate superintendent of schools.

In 1981, she headed to Oceanside, California, to become principal at St. Mary Star of the Sea School, but had served there only one year when she was asked to become curriculum director for the Diocese of San Diego. After a year in that role, she became principal at St. Therese Academy in San Diego. Three years later, in 1986, she went to El Cajon, California, to teach and then become principal at Our Lady of Grace School.

A move several hundred miles up the California coast came in 1997 when she was elected to a six-year term as Chapter Prioress of the Congregation's Pacific West Chapter. It was a ministry she greatly enjoyed. "I loved the office work, I loved the traveling and I loved the meetings," she wrote in her autobiography. "I have many fond memories of all my assignments, appointed and chosen, but my fondest

memories are with the Sisters as their Chapter Prioress, for they were a special blessing to me."

When her term was complete in 2003, she found her life greatly enriched by two volunteer experiences, one in Kenya that same year when the Assumption Sisters of Nairobi invited her to spend time ministering with them, and one in Haiti in 2004 when she was invited to assist at two hospitals established by Mother Teresa where babies who had been abandoned by their parents were cared for.

She continued to live in California until 2010, volunteering at the Dominican Rehabilitation Hospital several days a week, and then spent four years in Henderson, Nevada, where she continued her hospital volunteer work for a time. She returned to Adrian in 2014.

At the end of her autobiography, she wrote:

> *I have always had a happy religious life. ... As I continue to journey forth, I am called to deepen my relationship with God through my contemplative prayer. For it is through this contemplative spirit that discernment, communication, decision making, risk-taking flows. Religious life for me has been like a weaving; a tapestry of relationships, empowerment, collaborative decision making with diverse energies connected, unified, intertwined, all woven into that masterpiece of religious community. And so, this is what makes me so happy in religious life: praying with God, talking with God, laughing with God and understanding the "why" of things that have happened and are happening in my life today.*

Sister Jane Robert died at the Dominican Life Center on February 21, 2022. She was eighty-eight years old and in her seventieth year as an Adrian Dominican Sister.

Many nieces and nephews were among those who sent in their memories for the wake service, reminiscing about visits with her, happy conversations, and even the way she inspired their future careers.

Susan Stuckel Radis, for example, wrote about being nine years old when she and her sisters received a package from both Sister Jane Robert and Sister Jean Robert. Inside was "a treasure trove" of worksheets, coloring pages, pencils, crayons, and more. "Thus began our summertime 'school' in our garage for all the young children in our neighborhood, charging a nickel per child to attend," she wrote. "Perhaps that is what

drove my sisters, Marilyn and Ann, and myself into teaching careers. I would like to think so!"

Ann Stuckel Bates, for her part, definitely knew her aunt had helped shape her choice of career: "She told me, when I was barely out of first grade myself, that she was always asked to teach first grade because she loved to teach reading. This was the source of my own inspiration to become a primary grade teacher, and later a reading specialist."

Jeanne Witczak, the former Sister Jean Robert's daughter, recalled visiting her aunt in Las Vegas as a small child. Each time, when the family arrived at the convent, Jeanne, bursting with excitement, would run to the door, knock as hard as her little hand could and, when her aunt answered the door, jump joyously into her arms. "It will remain one of the best memories of my life," she wrote, "that of the greatest, purest love of an innocent child toward the woman who would transcend the role of Auntie and become my second Mother. I can still see her love of me in her eyes reflecting back into mine in those moments."

Sister Maria Goretti Browne preached the funeral homily.

> *... I often saw her on her usual trip around the grounds. ... One time, I noticed that she had stopped over at Ratisbon. ... There was a large statue of Mary near the house, and there was Jane standing there, holding both hands of Mary. I'm sure she was talking to Mary. That image stayed with me for a long time; that image of her connection to the mother of Jesus.*
>
> *... [T]his morning we have become aware, in her choice of readings[1] and music for her funeral, of the depths of her love for her God and God's love for her. We heard her lover speaking to her today: "O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and you are lovely." We can only imagine what her response must have been. Now this lovely one is with her love, this lover who came and got her, to be with h*





[1] Song of Songs 2:10-14, John 14:1-3.