SISTER MARIANA CARRIGAN
1921-1981

How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How inscrutable His judgments, how unsearchable His ways. (Romans 11:33)

To the extent that the wondrous, the unexpected, and the deep riches of God take life in a human heart, these words of St. Paul may well call to mind the person of Sister Mariana Carrigan. The daughter of Jessie Foley of Chicago, Illinois, and Joseph Carrigan of San Francisco, California, she came into this world on July 2, 1921, in San Mateo, California, and was baptized Mary Barbara in St. Matthew Church by Father Fidelis Kent Stone. She grew up with her older brothers, Joseph and William.

When she was in the third grade, her family moved to Chicago, and she was sent to St. Ambrose, her parish school. After completing eighth grade, she was enrolled at Aquinas High School where she was taught by Adrian Dominican Sisters and where, with several friends, she became a dedicated member of CISCA (Chicago Interstudent Social Catholic Action).

In her childhood, she had learned the art of storytelling, along with the skills of puppetry from her gifted mother; so, putting her hobby to work as a teaching tool, she gave her free time to the children of Chinatown. Sister Katherine Emery, her counselor at Aquinas, recalled that Mary wanted to join the Maryknoll Mission Society, but her mother would not hear of it. Nor would she approve of her daughter's entrance into any other religious congregation. Consequently, Mary remained home, and continued to demonstrate marionettes at Marshall Field's, as she had done during high school, and also to film commercials with Burr Tillstrom, a professional puppeteer. Most of her free time was spent with the people of Chinatown, the closest she could come to a foreign mission.

As she was nearing the age of 21, and still listening to what seemed to her a summons to a different kind of life, she "made a dash" for Adrian on Ash Wednesday of 1942, a radiant, vibrant young lady–and, as far as is known, the only candidate to choose Ash Wednesday for entrance into our Congregation.

By that time, Mary's mother had yielded to "the unquenchable desire of her daughter," and, later, a visit to Adrian softened the blow. Mary was received with the name Mariana on August 19, 1942, and professed on August 20, 1943.

Her first teaching assignment was to the second grade at St. Alphonsus, Dearborn, Michigan. While she was rounding out her second year there, the initial overseas mission of the Congregation was being born in the Dominican Republic. Aware that Sister Mariana had her heart set on the overseas mission, Mother Gerald sent her, with Sister Mary Kenneth Duwelius, to Havana, Cuba, to study the Spanish language. Thus, when the Colegio was opened the following year, she and Sister Kenneth were among the first faculty members. For 13 years, she taught children of various nations at the Colegio, and went out to the poor children with the other sisters on Sundays and during the greater part of vacation time. In the course of those years, fluent in Spanish, she earned her Licenciada and Doctorate at the University of Santo Domingo.

In 1959, she returned to teach in the States at Our Lady of Loretto School in Hometown, Illinois. At the end of eight years, she was transferred to St. Nicholas School in Chicago. While there, she was asked to teach at Colegio San Antonio in Guayama, Puerto Rico, in some way a fulfillment of her desire to be with Hispanic people.

Actually, she had spent her summers teaching Spanish-speaking doctors at Barry College in Miami, Florida, with Sister Kenneth; and, in addition, during the summer of 1968, she taught the handicapped children at Culmer Center, Miami, with Sisters Noel Kelley and Marilyn Morman.

There was never any doubt about Sister Mariana's creativity as a teacher, nor question of her fierce dedication to teaching. Yet, as she entered more intensely into the lives of the poor people, a new vision of herself among them took hold of her, and she longed to be free from school regulations. Her time of waiting ended in the spring of 1972, at which time she wrote from Guayama:

> *I am delighted with the turn of events that place me in Peru for next year, and, I hope, for many years to come. . . . I feel privileged to be starting off, at the half-century mark, for a new horizon in the apostolate. Until now, teaching in the schools has been my situation. True, I have taught the doctor's programs with Sister Kenneth many summers at Barry College, and have worked with children of all ages, races, and nationalities in recreational and educational centers, but this was during vacation time and afterschool hours. Now, I see new frontiers for my creativity, not bound by a school schedule, but free to initiate and innovate whatever, fired by the Spirit, I can best do, given the talents I already possess. Who knows better than God Himself what wonders lie before me, and, I in process of being and becoming, He in His wisdom may draw forth from me.*

Wonders, indeed, God drew from her. She began by assisting Sister Mary Kenneth, who had worked out a program with the doctors in the government hospital whereby she and Sister Mariana taught them English and they, in turn, rendered medical service to the poor people who came to the clinic provided by Sister Mary Kenneth from donations. At first, Sister Mariana spent some time entertaining young and old people with marionettes, and teaching them how to make them for their own amusement, in this way bringing a sparkle to sad eyes. However, as she penetrated the slums to visit the poorest of the poor, she found handicapped, retarded children huddled in corners of huts, whose parents, ashamed and powerless, were apparently hiding them. Others were begging in the streets.

As Sister Patricia Harvat said in the homily:

> *Sister Mariana wrote in her journal at that time, "Isaiah 35 is the scripture passage that reflects this period for me: 'They will come to Zion, shouting for joy, everlasting joy on their faces. Joy and gladness will go with them, and sorrow and lament be ended.'". . .*
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> *One can imagine the raptured faces of children as they watched Clippo do his antics and bring laughter to the hearts of the downcast. Clippo, a mischievous little fellow, light hearted and unpredictable, could very well be an extension of Sister Mariana.*

Yet, as Sister Patricia explained:

> *She gently put the puppets away, only to be brought out occasionally, and went to the handicapped children, shut up in houses, never coming out, and brought them out to the light of day. . . . Thus, she gave dignity to the downtrodden.*

Sister Patricia Shaw, a companion in the early Peru days of Sister Mariana, saw her in the process of demanding life and dignity for isolated and marginated children. She first worked with the parents who, in poverty, illiteracy and powerlessness, thought there were no resources, no way of helping their deaf, blind, and crippled children. Then, determined and courageous, Sister Mariana sought means to break down the bureaucratic barriers. Figuratively, she pounded on doors of government offices in her effort to found and fund a special school which could give equal services to poor children who had no access to special schools. Sister Patricia remembered:

> *Sister Mariana could not take a bureaucratic NO. . . . She agitated for, and effected, just and equal chances for these children. There are living monuments today of her unabashed love: witnesses who have braces on their legs; those who have had operations and can now walk, talk, hear, and, indeed, some see. Others have learned to write and read braille. . . . With Mariana's touch of life, these persons have seen a life position of margination and isolation change into an experience of personal dignity, integrity, and effectiveness. . . .*
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> *She was witness to me of one possibility of radical commitment and effective ministry among the poor. She integrated the change of unjust structure with the promotion of human dignity.*

In a published interview with Sister Mariana, Sister Elizabeth Roach, M.M., wrote at length that which is given here in summary:

> *I found her in a shack in Lima, Peru . . . working in the ceramics classroom of the school she founded for handicapped children. . . . Items made by these children were drying on shelves. "As the items are sold," Sister Mariana explained, "half the price goes to the maker; the other half helps cover the teacher's salary and the cost of the materials."*
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> *Later, a tour of the school revealed eight classrooms and a playground. In the mornings, the mentally retarded and the hearing-impaired came for classes. In the afternoon, the crippled and the blind.*
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> *"Lower down the hill, I rent a room in a private home where the cerebral palsy children get help," she said. "At present, 104 children are under instruction, and contact maintained with a total of 250." . . .*
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> *When Sister Mariana began visiting families living in shacks in the slums, she realized that even when she found professional help for the children, the parents could not manage the cost of bus fare to take the child to a specialist. She set about taking first one child, then another, to hospitals in the city for treatment. Through appeals to local Peruvian organizations and friends in the United States, she helped get cleft palates repaired and obtained orthopedic surgery, hearing tests,*

and eye operations; but, as a teacher, she knew that these children needed a school where they could learn to help themselves.

Thus, in 1974, she visited the Minister of Education, and applied for a school and salaried teachers in special education.

It should be mentioned here that the Adrian Sisters had been in Peru since 1963, and were trusted and respected. Moreover, Sister Mary Kenneth had been teaching English to medical students and doctors, and therein was a bond. Thus, as Sister Mariana would want it told, she had some supportive backup in her struggle.

In the interview that was published, Sister Elizabth Roach told the story of one little boy as an example of what happened to others.

Jose is one of the children Sister Mariana met the first day she went visiting. He had poliomyelitis. To get around, he crawled on the ground–begging on the streets and in the local bars. Admiring his pluck, she asked him what he would like more than anything else. 'To be able to walk," was his reply. Sister Mariana wrote to Monsignor James Hardiman, whom she knew from her days at St. Nicholas Parish in Chicago. He has not only financed the needs of Jose, but of other children helped by surgery. Jose was hospitalized and operated on. By early 1974, he was walking.

Several other people helped, too, both Peruvians and Americans. Most significant of all, the parents of the special children, now strengthened with hope, helped to clear the land and to construct the school.

During this "second spring" of her lifetime, she wrote some statements about herself in her journal:

As a woman reflecting on my life, I am called and loved by Divine Love. In return, I feel called to a universal love of others by celibate living. I want to be myself by becoming alive to the Word of Jesus. . . . I believe that the best way to preach the Good News is to live it among the people in a community of service and love. . . . I direct my efforts to searching out the abandoned, handicapped children, and investigating means to improve their spiritual and physical condition in company with their parents.

She wrote, too, of her ministry in forming Christian communities in various areas with the Maryknoll sisters and priests, and of her plan to inaugurate a sewing program for older crippled girls.

I have an obligation to serve–the best service is one that is needed now. I must remember that personal fulfillment is not the purpose of my ministry. . . . It is not for my benefit.

Such were the qualities that young women and men from Notre Dame University discovered in her as they offered their service during vacation periods. Statements such as the following are multiplied in a sheaf of letters:

You have been a force of light and direction in my life. You have changed me–to be sure, not enough, for I am still conceited and selfish–but I know that I am better, and able to serve better, through having known you. (Signed by a young man)

What I am learning from you, Sister Mariana, as each day I watch your words immediately take action, is of the infinite value of each person, of the hidden capacities of each one being brought forth. I do not understand how you are able to juggle so many concerns at one time, and execute them so well. (Signed by a young woman)

There was an extraordinary beauty of heart in Sister Mariana. "We can guess," said a friend, "that it was surely born of the inscrutable, unsearchable depths of God's riches."

On July 28, 1981, in words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, she gave this "beauty back to God, Beauty's Self and Beauty's Giver."

