

Tributes to Sister Teresa-Joseph Pegus, O.Carm.



Sister Teresa-Joseph Pegus, O.Carm., of the Corpus Christi Carmelites, died peacefully in Leicester on 1st February 2011, aged 80. She was one of the best-known sisters of her congregation, and much loved by the people whom she served in a variety of apostolates. She was a great supporter of the Lay Carmelite community in Leicester, and whilst recuperating from an operation was a regular participant at the Carmelite Spirituality Group in York. In 2008 her contribution to society was noted by the Queen who bestowed on her the M.B.E. In 2010 her contribution was noted by the Vatican, which gave her the highest honour available to a lay-person, the Holy Cross *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*. Below we publish two tributes given at her funeral on 14th February.

Tribute by Sister Petronilla Joseph, O.Carm., Superior General of the Corpus Christi Carmelites

Sr. Teresa-Joseph was born in Trinidad, the youngest of six children, coming after four boys. This experience of living in the midst of several brothers was to play a significant role in her life, preparing her for her work with boys of all ages in the Children's Home and in the Young Offenders' Prison.

Her vocation came early in life; before leaving school she was already visiting our community in Belmont, helping in the sacristy and wherever she could be useful. It was there she met our foundress, Mother Mary Ellerker, and told her of her desire to be a sister. It was arranged for her to enter when she left school at the age of seventeen. Sister's enthusiasm was so great she thought she could leave school in the afternoon and go straight to the convent as she did not want to waste any time in giving her life to God. It was a disappointment when she learned she would have to wait one week!

Shortly after profession Sister was sent to our mission in Guyana. There were two dedicated and talented teachers in the community from whom she learned much and with whom she enjoyed working. She loved being involved in the production of plays, concerts and music festivals, preparing children for First Holy Communion and other forms of catechesis. After ten years Sister returned to Trinidad for a short time, and then on to Barbados where she worked for three years in our residential home for mentally-disadvantaged children. This was a big contrast to her experience in Guyana but she was always open to something new and applied herself willingly.

After this, it was back to Trinidad again where she was Assistant to the Novice Directress with special responsibilities for postulants. This post was to last for three years. Sister especially enjoyed hiking with her charges in the hills, outdoor picnics and barbecues. It was a difficult time with the turbulence in religious life at the time of Vatican II, but Sr. Teresa-Joseph managed to steer an even course.

As we were short of sisters in England, Sister was mobilized to go there where she was to serve in our Children's Home in Kirby Muxloe near Leicester. Many and varied were her experiences there which would fill a book. As in her previous assignments, Sister threw herself wholeheartedly into all the tasks at hand. It is a testimony to her relationship with our former boys and girls that

almost thirty years later many of those she cared for visited her or made contact during her last illness.

After ten years Sr. Teresa-Joseph was appointed Regional Superior and moved to our newly founded house in West Walk. She remained there for twenty years, except for a short period when she moved to St. Edward's Presbytery with two other sisters. The time there was spent in pastoral ministry in several parishes: Holy Cross, St. Mary's, St. John Bosco's and when they moved, ten years later, St. Thomas More's. Parish life gave scope to her talents of music (Sister played the piano, organ and guitar and she enjoyed singing) and of acting (she was a swaggering King Herod in the parish nativity play). She loved passing on her faith through catechesis. West Walk, because of its proximity to the railway station, became an open house and all kinds of people passed through there and enjoyed her hospitality. Sister loved to cook; the more she had to cook for the better it was for her. She once remarked if she were not a sister she would have liked to open a patisserie!

It was during her time there that Sister became involved in the prison ministry at Glen Parva. As with everything else she plunged into the ministry wholeheartedly and was always available to both staff and prisoners in need. Her work often consisted of visiting the hospital section, helping those on the verge of suicide, comforting the bereaved, both prisoners and their families. She walked miles in the prison compound to reach whoever wanted her counsel. It was her compassion and dedication which inspired the 'Sister Teresa Award for those who are always there' and led to her receiving the M.B.E. and later the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* medal. There was also time for humour when she willingly undertook a sponsored twenty-four hour lock-up in a cell.

Although in her late seventies Sister never looked her age. She was so energetic and full of life. It was the onset of vascular disease and cancer which brought about the change. Even having a prosthesis was a challenge and she was determined to continue as much of her life as before. Sadly she let go of the prison ministry but she wanted to continue whatever was possible in the parish and in her own community. When she was confined to bed the endless visitors who came to the Hospice and Nursing Home from far and wide bore witness to the love she inspired and to the countless lives she had touched.

May she rest in peace.

Tribute by one of the prison officers at H.M. Young Offender's Institution Glen Parva

It is an honour for me to carry out this sad duty on behalf of my colleagues in the Prison Service.

I have known Sister Teresa-Joseph for over 30 years, man and boy. Sister asked me some months ago to speak at her funeral in the event that her illness was terminal. I questioned her if this was a wise decision, bearing in mind that I am known for my direct speaking and that her reputation was at stake. Smiling, she asked what I meant by this. I replied: "Let's look at the evidence before us Sister. You are laying here in a maternity hospital, taking hard drugs intravenously, and have just been discharged from over 20 years in prison." She laughed uncontrollably.

Sister was known for her love of life, people, and above all Holy Mother Church. Today would not have been a sad day for her; to be at peace and with her God was what Sister worked towards all

her life. Therefore I think it is appropriate that we are here to say goodbye to her on Saint Valentine's Day.

To us in the Prison Service she was always there, so much so, that an award was created in her name. She was bemused by the honours bestowed upon her by State (MBE) and latterly by the Church (*Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*) as she maintained she was but a simple nun!

Personally her passing has left a great void in my life, and I am sure in all of yours too.

God bless you Sister Teresa, your work is done, rest in peace.