



“For an ordinary person, I’ve had an extraordinarily happy and interesting life.” - Sister Marie Carmel Dunning

Sister Marie Carmel Dunning, 101, a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL) for 71 years, died on September 3, 2022, at Ross Hall in Leavenworth, Kan. Sister Marie Carmel touched many lives through her ministries in education and health care, and with her timeless poetry.

Anna Lee Dunning was born on June 12, 1921, in Miles City, Mont., the fourth of 13 children of Forest and Beatrice (Tucker) Dunning. She grew up on a farmstead in the Otter Creek Tongue River area of Montana. This simple, ranch-dwelling family endured poverty during long droughts and the Great Depression. Three wars personally affected the Dunning family, where six brothers and one sister were in the service and fortunately came home without serious injury. Anna Lee naturally inherited a strong work ethic, a profound respect for others, and deep roots that always reminded her of her resilient beginnings.

Before she met the SCLs, she knew about their origins from reading biographies of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac to whom the religious Community traces its origins. On August 21, 1951, at the age of 30, she entered the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, a Community she had already grown to love. She professed her final vows as Sister Marie Carmel on August 22, 1959.

For her first 23 years as an SCL, Sister Marie Carmel’s ministries comprised teaching in elementary and high schools across the west and mid-west, including three years as principal at Sacred Heart School in Falls City, Neb. After her years in the education field, Sister Marie Carmel shifted to healthcare. Upon completion of her clinical pastoral education, Sister Marie Carmel worked in many pastoral care capacities at a variety of hospitals. She served in administrative positions, supervised home health volunteers, coordinated pastoral care departments, and became a voice of friendship and peace for hospice patients. Pertaining to her ministry in hospice, Sister Marie Carmel once reflected on why she chose this service to humanity: *“To walk the last miles with a dying person makes us, the stranger, an intimate friend. The ground on which they walk becomes both holy and common, bonded in finiteness.”*

The recollection of her ministry in the hospice field is just a glimpse into the spirit of Sister Marie Carmel. She was not only a cherished companion, but she was also a mentor, a leader, a caregiver, a dedicated advocate, an artist, and a faithful, life-loving servant of God. When she retired, Sister Marie Carmel dedicated her time to social justice advocacy, corresponding and doing outreach and prayer with women in the Kansas City area, and to her poetry, where her robust zest for life radiated.

Preceding Sister Marie Carmel’s death were her parents, her nine brothers Les, Glen, Leonard, Jim, Charlie, Frank, George, Dick, Tommy, and her two sisters, Mina Tonkavich and Patty Anderson. Lena Harris, the last surviving sibling, passed away a week and a day after Sister Marie Carmel at the age of 93. Sister Marie Carmel will be missed by her many nieces and nephews, friends, and all of her SCL Sisters and Associates.

Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022

Homecoming — 4:00 p.m.

Vigil Service — 7:00 p.m.

Ross Chapel

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022

Mass of Christian Burial

10:30 a.m.

Ross Chapel