



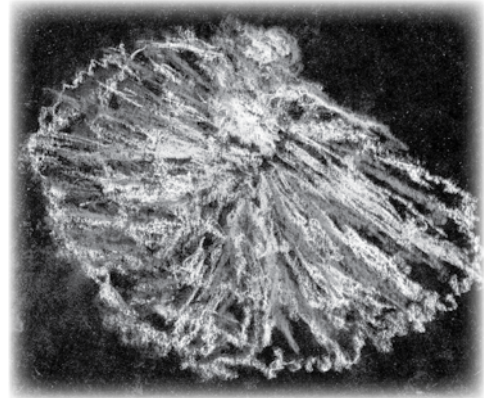
Sister Joannette Nitz, OP

Born to earthly life: October 6, 1921
Religious profession: August 4, 1942
Entered eternal life: December 11, 2010

“I’VE BEEN DANCING TOWARD GOD MY WHOLE LIFE,” Sister Joannette Nitz explained her pastel drawing in late

November to S. Barbara Kukla. And what a dance it was!

This daughter of Alvin and Leona Nitz was born Beaver Dam, WI, on October 6, 1921, and they named her Mary. She learned early the values of simple living, hard work, and faithfulness. By age 10, Mary had decided she would become a sister. She had heard stories that when she was a baby, “Grandmother often held me and said, ‘Mary will be a sister when she grows up.’” She fulfilled her grandmother’s prophecy at age 18 when she left home – against her parents’ wishes – to enter the Racine Dominicans. That determination to do what she believed should be done, no matter the consequences, characterized S. Joannette’s life for the next 71 years.



S. Joannette dancing toward God

She loved studying and teaching, which she did for 28 years, before moving out of the classroom and into the neighborhood. She lived in Detroit during the tumultuous 1960s, witnessing first-hand how systems and society oppress people and diminish humanity. She worked tirelessly to bridge the disconnect between races and classes, building relationships and teaming up with civic and church leaders to address justice issues systemically. Among other long-lasting efforts is a ministry to the incarcerated she initiated that continues to serve five decades later.

S. Joannette was an “anti-racist, anti-war, pro-people and pro-peace activist – not unrelated to her being a Dominican woman, committed to truth,” the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights (MCHR) stated in presenting its Lifetime Commitment Award to her. “Joannette has been dedicated to working against racism in its structural forms through hundreds of personal contacts with men, women and children suffering the consequences.”

She was truly the “center of energy in difficult periods,” the MCHR noted. “She keeps many of us keenly aware of the Middle East, current attacks on civil rights and debt relief. Friend, elder, heroine of the struggle – she challenges us to analyze more clearly, organize more effectively, and act more passionately for the dispossessed and oppressed both at home and abroad.”

Dear to S. Joannette’s heart were the struggling people of Africa, especially South Africa. Following nearly 20 years in Detroit urban ministry, she spent two months in Africa studying issues of racism, poverty, control and the relationship among them. Apartheid still existed, and S. Joannette saw clearly the link between the global economic system and injustice. She returned to Detroit with renewed passion and commitment to the struggle against racism locally and globally.

S. Joannette spent most of her 68 years in ministry “in peace and justice solidarity work, strengthening me in my efforts to live the Gospel of Jesus who called for a world in which all people are one – no matter our sex, color or creed,” she said. “A world in which we visit prisoners, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, suffer persecution, and find happiness in a compassionate justice which looks in the eyes of sisters and brothers and proclaims love.”