



## Sister Eugenia Kaster, OP

Born to earthly life: August 31, 1927  
Religious profession: August 15, 1950  
Entered eternal life: January 8, 2020

“Whenever she entered a room, there was joy.”

*Sister Eugenia’s sister, Therese*

**I**N GATHERING TO CELEBRATE SISTER EUGENIA KASTER’S LIFE, community members, friends and family all shared special stories and experiences of this joy-filled woman. “She was the easiest person to talk to,” her youngest brother Eugene noted. “She was always warm and funny.”

Gardina Mary was the eighth of George and Cora Kaster’s 13 children, the eldest of three daughters. “Dean,” as her siblings called her, was born in 1927, two years before the family was hit hard by the Great Depression, losing their farm near Freedom, WI. They were forced to move several times before finally settling on a farm near Pulaski when Gardina was 17 years old. By then, six of her 10 brothers were serving in World War II, and Gardina helped out in the fields and in the barn, in addition to doing household chores. “It was hard work, but I loved the freedom I felt in the wide open spaces,” she said. “Out in the fields, I carried no watch but followed the movement of the sun, and I knew when to come and go.”

At age 19, Gardina greeted her mother one morning with, “Ma, you don’t care if I go to the convent, do you?” Though shocked, Cora supported by her daughter’s request, and two years later, Gardina made her First Profession as a Racine Dominican, becoming Sister Eugenia. Leaving behind her beloved family and farm life was traumatic for the young woman, yet she grew to love being a sister. In celebrating her 60<sup>th</sup> jubilee in 2010, she marveled at the rich fulfillment community life gave her: “To pray together, to have the same priorities, to never be alone in striving for a goal.” She treasured being a Racine Dominican, wanting people to know, “the pursuit of justice that can bring peace is contagious ... let it grab hold of you!”

Sister Eugenia brought her characteristic joy to ministry, whether teaching, serving in health care, or as “Pastor Kaster” in hospital chaplaincy and pastoral care. Associate Jim Kruse, who worked with her at St. Luke’s Hospital in Racine and became a dear friend reflected, “She touched so many lives. She never judged; she always listened carefully to each person.”

Nieces, nephews and great-nieces and -nephews each experienced her joy, care and focused listening. “She always made you feel special,” several noted at S. Eugenia’s remembering service. When six-year-old great-niece Billie faced heart surgery, it was S. Eugenia who gave her the incentive to endure the dreaded exercise needed to strengthen her heart. She drew a giant foot, posting it at the end of the long corridor Billie was required to walk. Each day as Billie completed her walk, she was rewarded by marking off a toe! The incentive worked so well that several more giant feet quickly appeared next to Billie’s, motivating other children reluctant to exercise.

“She was sweet, sassy, kind, loving,” niece Marya summarized, noting S. Eugenia was “always there,” supporting family members with her compassion, care and humor.

Jim may have best captured the impact S. Eugenia had on everyone whose lives she touched. “I am so much better for having known her,” he said.

Aren’t we all?