



Name: Sister Kay Elmer (Sister Vianney)
Date of Birth: November 28, 1924
Place of Birth: Maribel, Wisconsin
Parents: Henry Albert and Catherine Mary (Spurney) Elmer
Religious Profession: August 15, 1954
Date of Death: June 11, 2021
Age: 96
Years Professed: 66

Wake Reflection by Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director

Catherine Mary Elmer was born in Maribel, Wisconsin on November 28, 1924 to Henry Albert and Catherine Mary (Spurney) Elmer. She was Baptized in St. Joseph's Church in Kellnersville on December 7, 1924 and Confirmed there on April 21, 1938, receiving the name Collette.

Henry's first wife, Anna Lodel, died during WWI, as a result of the flu. Henry was left with three children, Alvin, Wencel and Anita, who was three months old. Catherine's first husband, Frank Christel, died early in their marriage. They had one son, Ralph. In God's plan, Henry and Catherine met, got married and had two children, John and Catherine, who was nicknamed Kay.

Kay attended Maribel Grade School. She then went to St. Joseph's Parish School in Kellnersville for two years of High School. The Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity staffed the school. Kay was especially fond of Sister Marie Therese Kessler and Sister Eulogia Mielke. Her last two years were at Lincoln High School graduating in 1941. After High School, Kay had Office jobs in Manitowoc as Bookkeeper and/or Secretary in the Napp Office and School Supply, National Bank, Clipper City Transit Company, Dewane Brothers Hardware Store in Maribel, and for five years as Service Rep at the Bell Telephone Company. Kay also was a Nurse's Aide for a year.

It was during the years at the Telephone Company that Kay joined the Sodality at Holy Innocents Parish. On her weekends she volunteered to type the parish weekly bulletin, record Sunday Offerings and help the Parish Housekeeper. During

that time, Kay became more curious about Religious Life and becoming a Sister. Her friends encouraged her to talk with someone to help her sort out her thinking and answer her questions. Kay had developed the practice of attending an annual weekend Retreat at Monte Alverno Retreat House in Appleton. She took the advice of her friends and prayed for the grace to know what direction to take. After the Retreat, Kay had a firm conviction that she should be a Sister.

After Kay talked with Sister Julius Wickesberg, the principal at Holy Innocents School, about her Retreat experience, a visit to Holy Family Convent was arranged. Kay was impressed with the authentic joy she saw in the Postulants and Novices. She imagined that their spirit was the result of a happy spiritual life with the Lord. Kay was appreciative of the deep faith of her parents with the daily praying of the rosary and other devotional practices. She felt that God was calling her to deepen her spiritual life.

In a letter to Mother Edna, dated April 21, 1952, Kay wrote:

Dear Mother Superior:

Have been thinking about a religious vocation for a long time and have decided that now is the time to do something about it. So, I am therefore, humbly asking admittance to your Order with the hope that you will see fit to accept me.

I will anxiously await your reply.

*Sincerely in Christ,
Catherine Elmer*

Catherine was over-joyed to receive application papers. As part of the application process she asked her Pastor, Father Edward A. Radey, to send a letter of recommendation. The following letter was dated August 20, 1952:

Dear Mother Edna:

We are called upon very frequently to give letters of recommendation. We are sometimes hesitant in giving favorable reports, but I assure you that this is not the case today. It pleases me immensely to give a most favorable report for Miss Catherine Elmer.

In the few years that I have known her, I have never seen her do, or heard her say a single thing that would in any way detract from a sterling character. Catherine lived with us for a year, and so we got to know her very well.

The sincerity in the practice of her faith has been an inspiration to all who came in contact with her. Her charity in the willingness to do things for the Church and the Honor of God has no bounds. Catherine is the child of very plain people, who also are very devout and zealous in the practice of their Catholic faith.

Leaving our Parish, Catherine will be greatly missed. However, since it is her choice to serve God in this manner, we are most happy that our Local Order should be the recipient of such a fine girl. We will continue to hope and pray that we may find other such worthy girls to become brides of Christ. May God bless your Order that you may be able to fill the crying need for more workers in the Lord's Vineyard.

*Sincerely yours in Christ,
Father Edward A. Radey*

Kay was accepted and entered Holy Family Convent on August 22, 1952. Reception of the Habit was on June 13, 1953, and Kay received the name, Sister Vianney. She had read about the Cure of Ars before entering the Convent and was struck with his simplicity and holiness. These were virtues that she wanted to emulate. It was after Vatican Council II that Sister Vianney discerned to return to the baptismal form of her name, Sister Kay.

Sister Kay earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Holy Family College in 1958, with a Major in English and a Minor in History. She continued her education attending the University of North Dakota, earning a Master's Degree in Business Education in 1967. Sister Kay used her work experience and education to teach Business and English to high school students at St. Willibrord's in Chicago, St. Mary's in Delaware, OH and Holy Name in Escanaba, MI. She served as secretary, the Business Office at Silver Lake College of the Holy Family and then was appointed Student Financial Aid Director, a position she held for twenty years. In a Jubilee reflection Sister Kay wrote, "The apostolate of helping students achieve their educational goals of career preparedness and of improving their lives was very fulfilling." Sister Kay also served in various Community areas of need, before moving to St. Rita Health Center in 2015. Sister Kay would say, "I am grateful for God's continuing grace in sustaining, encouraging and comforting me through all the years."

Sister Kay was a gifted writer. She was asked to write Grants for ten years and she wrote many articles for a Community publication, *The Memo*. In 1968 Sister Kay received a scholarship to take a General Course in Graphoanalysis, the study of the individual strokes of handwriting to determine the character and personality of the writer. Sister Kay was invited to analyze the handwriting in the letters of Saint Teresa of Jesus of the Andes, a Chilean Carmelite who died at the age of 19 in 1920. Father Michael Griffin, a Carmelite Priest, wrote several books about Saint Teresa of the Andes, including, *Letters of Saint Teresa of Jesus of the Andes*, which featured information gathered from handwriting analysis done by Sister Kay.

Sister Kay enjoyed photography recording events. She would often say, "A picture tells so much, it is worth a thousand words!" She also enjoyed genealogy, baking, sewing, reading, learning new things and visiting. Sister Kay enjoyed life!

Sister Kay was appreciative of the many blessings in her life. At the time of her Jubilee she wrote of her gratitude for God giving her a self-sacrificing and loving family who nurtured her by example in the Catholic Faith. "Along the way, family and friends, old and new, have been beacons of light, joy and inspiration for me. I am grateful to my Sisters in Community and all who have shown me the joys of living a life in which God is given priority. I am grateful for the inspiring example of my relatives in Religious Life: Monsignor Charles Elmer, Sister Karlene Berger and Sister Karen Anne Berger. All of my relationships have led me to a deeper relationship with our Loving God. Hopefully, His life will shine through me to others."

Sister Kay, you were a gracious woman and the love of God did shine through you. Thank you for your witness as a Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity. May your example, of loving kindness, live on in the lives of the people you felt privileged to know.

Eternal life grant to Sister Kay, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace. AMEN!