



## Maryknoll Sisters

*Making God's love visible*

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March 7, 2012

Dear Sisters, Relatives and Friends,

On February 28, 2012, the news of Sister Katherine Taepke's death at Phelps Memorial Hospital, Sleepy Hollow, NY came as a great shock. She was being treated for abdominal distress and seemed to be slowly improving when she suffered a heart attack and died. She was 90 years old and had been a Maryknoll missionary for 61 years.

Katherine Anne Taepke was born on September 17, 1921, in Detroit, Michigan, one of four daughters, born to Grace (Price) and Walter G. Taepke, all of whom have predeceased her. She attended Annunciation Parish Grammar and High School in Detroit. From 1939 to 1942, she studied nursing at St. Joseph's Hospital in London, Ontario, Canada, where she received her Registered Nurse Certificate. She then worked as an Obstetric Nurse in a small hospital. While there, she was invited by one of the doctors to work as an assistant in his Office. A very dedicated physician, he had one of the largest practices on the East Side of Detroit. He taught her many things that proved very helpful in her future work in Tanzania. In 1946, she took a four-month postgraduate obstetric course at the University of Chicago Lying-in Hospital and received her certificate. She also studied part time at the University of Detroit.

At the time, she met a Maryknoll Sister who invited her to consider a missionary vocation. Katie responded to this invitation and entered the Maryknoll Sisters on September 6, 1950. Katie said her whole life changed when she was accepted as a Maryknoll postulant. At her Reception Katie received the religious name of Sister Elizabeth Grace. She returned to her baptismal name after Vatican II. She made her First Vows in 1953 at Maryknoll, NY. Her first assignment was to the Tuberculosis Sanatorium operated by the Maryknoll Sisters in Monrovia, CA. A year later, she was one of the pioneers assigned to Queen of the World Hospital in Kansas City. There, besides setting up and managing the Obstetrical Clinic, she was also in charge of the Hospital Ward.

In 1957, Sister Katherine was assigned to Tanganyika (which became Tanzania in 1964), Africa. She often recalled the words of her mother, who was convinced that Katie would never be assigned overseas because of her age: she was 36. She made her Final Vows in Africa in 1959. She first worked in the Maryknoll Dispensary in the Village of Rosana in the northern part of the country. There she contracted cerebral malaria, and was advised to move to another part of the country. She first went to Nyegina in 1962, and then to a very dry area of Shinyanga to recuperate. In 1963, she went to Kowak, the Maryknoll Sisters first African mission. There was a hospital in Kowak, and Katie served as its Supervisor. In 1964, she was assigned to Nassa where she did clinic work. When a clinic opened in Sayusayu, Katie was given charge of the outpatient department and the 20-bed maternity clinic. From 1970 to 1986, she worked in the clinic in Mwamapalala, which she herself had set up.

In 1977, she returned to the states for renewal, and stayed to do promotion and mission education work. Katie did not find it easy to ask for support. She took a communications course. After much prayer – and with the help of the Holy Spirit – she said she felt more at ease approaching people and asking for their financial and prayerful support. She said, "Christ said, 'Come follow Me', and in these past three years, I feel I have followed in His footsteps, moving frequently from place to place and sleeping in bed after bed. As a result, people have responded and entered into their own missionary role." She felt that this experience had added something positive and spiritual in her life and tried to share her experience with others.



Sister Katherine Taepke  
1921 - 2012

After her next renewal, and before returning to Tanzania, Sister Katie went to Drogheda, Ireland, where she received her Midwifery Certificate from Lourdes Hospital, in order to satisfy requirements then in place in Tanzania. On her return to Tanzania, she worked for two years with the Medical Missionaries of Mary in their hospital in Makiungu in Singida as Maternal and Child Health Coordinator.

In 1984, she went to Bariadi where she started clinics, did dispensary work, taught Natural Family Planning and took mobile clinics to rural areas. She continued in this ministry until 1992, when she moved to Mwanza where she also did Pastoral work and had an AIDS ministry until 2001.

In 2002, she went to Musoma. There she undertook more pastorally oriented work. She visited the people in Small Christian Communities. She always welcomed them when they visited her. She also continued her AIDS work part-time. In an interview at the time, she gave a good description of herself. She said, "I have been used as God's instrument in giving the Tanzanian medical services, counseling and in praying with them in their small Christian Communities. My friends are young and old...I have two godchildren, now, married with families. I have lived with several Tanzanian women who are steadfast friends. The medical personnel at present in the clinics, which I started, have become self-reliant. This has moved me on to other ministries. "This year I am in retirement. I am still in Tanzania and changing my life-style. I have time for home visiting in our large parish of St. Augustine. There are many poor and sick people. I have been able to refer complicated cases to the regional Consultant Center 150 miles away where there is a steady presence of medical and surgical specialists from overseas who volunteer their expertise to help Tanzanians.

"My special joy is to spend one day a week at the orphanage where 32 children under the age of two are being cared for. One or both parents of these children have died because of HIV/AIDS. Most of the children are healthy and active. They crave affection and love to sit on my lap and get a hug. There's a line-up of youngsters surrounding my chair awaiting their turn for love. We are in communion with each other. The children speak few words but the light in their eyes speaks to my heart. In spite of frustration and failures, I have received a hundredfold of blessings."

Sister Katie returned to the Center in 2006, and though retired, continued to be in ministry in Residential Care IV up until one week ago when she was received into the arms of her Creator. Sister Katie was, indeed, a People-person and will be missed by many here and in Africa.

Sister Katie often visited her relatives in Canada. We offer them our condolences. We welcome those who are here with us today: Katie's nephew Michael McKeough and his wife Cathy, Niece Liz McKeough, grandnephew Matthew, and Arthur, Matthew's father-in-law. We also offer condolences to Phyllis Bissonette, and Joanne Miya, two very good friends, who are unable to be with us. Our celebrant today is Father Ernest Brunelle, Maryknoll Father, who was also a good friend and we welcome him as celebrant of today's Liturgy of Christian Burial.

Lovingly in Our Lady of Maryknoll.

*Sister Marian Teresa Dury*

Sister Marian Teresa Dury, MM  
Community Member

Condolences may be sent to Sister Katie's nephew:

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