

Sister Maureen Joseph Kirwan, SC

Entered eternal life on January 26, 2023

Good morning. My name is Jennifer Kirwan Hyatt and although a lot of you knew this amazing lady we are honoring today as Sister Maureen Joseph, myself, my siblings and my cousins, all knew her as Aunt Rene or just Rene.

Out of the 12 siblings, my father, Patrick, was Rene's only younger sibling, or as she liked to call him, my baby brother. I am also privileged enough to be her Goddaughter. Which brings me to a funny story about my birth, and how she became my Godmother. Over the years, I've heard different versions of this story from my siblings and my mom, but my brother Larry's version is definitely the funniest. Just a little back story, I'm the seventh of eight children.

Larry writes:

So, it was Mother's Day, May 14, 1972. Mom was expecting. Mary Pat, Brian, me and maybe Theresa was old enough to make Mom breakfast in bed. We had everything on a tray and brought it up the stairs. In the meantime, Mom's water broke. Aunt Rene was helping Mom when we knocked on the door. She cracked open the door and asked what we wanted. When we told her that we made breakfast in bed, she said that she would tell Mom. Mom told Aunt Rene to throw the blanket over her and to let us in. We gave Mom breakfast and presents, and she said thank you very much. We went downstairs and in a few minutes Aunt Rene was helping Mom down the stairs, telling us that she was going to have the baby now.

She stayed with us for a week. She cooked for us, although we missed Mom's cooking. She even led us in morning calisthenics. Brian didn't want to do them and would joke around instead. Years Later, At Mom and Dad's 60th birthday dinner/roast she told this story and ended with, "I came for a brief vacation, and ended up spending the week taking care of the kids. I've never been so grateful for my vocation in all my life!"

Before she left, my parents asked one more thing of her, to be my Godmother. But she wasn't just my special person, she was everyone's! Every Christmas, Aunt Rene came and spent a week at our house. Some of my fondest childhood memories of her were during these times. She always came with lots of hugs, songs and laughter to share, oh, and of course presents for everyone. I loved being in her arms, her rocking me back and forth and singing to me. Her voice was so angelic. My mom used to call her the singing nun. She sang the Irish Wedding Song at my wedding and many other Kirwan weddings. I just remember how beautiful she sounded and how special it was to hear her sing about our Heritage, God and Marriage. I can still hear her singing it! Sing, May God Bless this couple who married today.

She made all of us feel so loved but not just by her and family, but by God. She encouraged us to do our best, was always there for us if we needed her, and loved us unconditionally. She was a straight shooter, gave us Godly advice and was our moral compass (whether we asked for it or not).

Aunt Rene loved all her family! Her Mom and Dad, Brothers and Sisters, Nieces and Nephews and all the In-Laws. She was even popular with our friends. Everyone loved Aunt Rene! Our friends couldn't get over how she would get out on the dance floor at weddings and Cut a Rug! She was one cool Lady, the dancing nun!

We are all going to miss our Aunt Rene. She helped our family stay close and have love for one another. She had such an influence on all our lives, and she was my hero!

I love you, Aunt Rene! See you again one day!



Jennifer Kirwan Hyatt
Niece of Sister Maureen Joseph

I have so many wonderful memories of Rene and the times we spent together.

When Rene entered the convent, the family visited her on Sundays. We would all show up dressed in our finest. However, one Sunday Peggy Lou fell in the pond with her velvet outfit on.

When Rene made final profession, it was a beautiful Mass in this magnificent church. I remember arriving in the car with Father Fitzgerald, Patty and Nanny. Father Fitz let Patty drive across the railroad tracks on our way to the church.

At St. Michael's High School, I took Stenography. I would write to Rene in shorthand, and she would write back to me in shorthand.

So many wonderful memories: Shapanack vacation - Rene and I walking to Mass in the morning. Many Pensacola visits staying at Al's condo and the convent.

When I was hesitant, Rene encouraged me to drive to Virginia to a family reunion. She sat next to me and said she would take over if I needed her. She gave me the courage to do it. That was Rene - always encouraging us.

Trips to family reunions in Pennsylvania with Rene and BobbiAnn. We always shared a room and had many laughs.

St. Patrick parades in Bayonne with the best corned beef. Thank you, Eileen and Cliff.

On Family vacations, Rene always taught the youngest to swim and dive. Then she took each little one for ice cream but individually so she would get to know each child.

Thanksgiving celebrations. Always happy with plum pudding and Cliff lighting it up each time.

One year, I rented a house at Pensacola Beach for Rene and my family. She and I shared the beautiful master suite. Unfortunately, she could not get into the very high king-sized bed although she tried. However, she was happy with the little bed in the room.

Rene was with us all our lives. Each generation is blessed to know her and be loved by her. God Bless Rene!

Maureen Ward
Niece of Sister Maureen Joseph

I am Peggy Bryson. My father was Ed Kirwan and Irene was my father's youngest sister. Other than being my babysitter once that I can recall (and she was very strict!), my memories of Aunt Rene begin in this Chapel. I was five, seated right about there. I watched her walk down this aisle, a little black organdy cap on her head. She exchanged that cap for a veil and became Sister Maureen Joseph. Our family was very proud of her vocation. It almost made up for my father not becoming a priest.

Not long after, we were all back to see Aunt Rene receive another veil. However, that day became memorable for another reason. I fell in a well on these grounds. My cousin Jim pulled me out and I went home wearing various items of nuns' clothing, the center of attention!

Aunt Rene studied, she taught, and before long was called to work in Pensacola. Her high school students were African American. Her fellow parishioners were African American. Sister Maureen, a little white nun from Jersey City, found a new home and a new family there.

Aunt Rene was very proud of her students and how they kept in touch. She often told us about their careers and their successes. This did cause her some concern when she had her knee replaced, though. She was concerned that if she woke up in pain, her language might be less than nun-like, and she might scandalize her former students now working in the hospital!

After the high school closed, Aunt Rene began her parish work which included working with refugees and the undocumented. To encourage them, she carried her father's naturalization papers.

Our grandfather had been illegal, living in America for many years before becoming a citizen in 1923. Peggy and I went to visit Aunt Rene around that time. She picked us up from the airport. As we drove, she said, "Girls, I don't want you to be concerned, but the Sisters of Charity are mentioned on the KKK hotline this week. They've mistaken us for the Trinitarians." And yes, there was a number to call to hear the hateful rhetoric of the week, directed at the nuns who were ministering to the refugees. Segregation may have ended, but bigotry and prejudice had not.

When I read her beautiful obituary, I was awed by what this woman had accomplished and what a life of service she had led. And yet, she was always there for us (and there are a lot of us!). She was always our Aunt Rene. She knew about our lives. She knew the names of our spouses and partners, the names of our children and their children. Each phone call ended with, love you! Her rooms in the nursing homes had every surface covered with cards and photos from her family. She supported us with love and encouraged us in our faith, whichever path we were called to follow. When my daughters were confirmed, she sent gifts and notes of congratulation. It didn't matter to her that they were confirmed in the Methodist Church. To Aunt Rene, it mattered that they had studied and affirmed their Christian faith.

I have a bible verse sent to me by email every morning. On Saturday, it was from Philippians 4:4-9.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

I read this and I knew that this was Aunt Rene's lasting gift to us. Whenever we are bowed down and burdened by worries and concerns, we will have her life of love and service to God, to others, and to all of us, to think about and to emulate. Her life was a blessing to us, truly excellent and worthy of praise.

Peggy Bryson
Niece of Sister Maureen Joseph