

Sister Grace Reape, SC
Entered eternal life on May 19, 2022

During her lifetime Sister Grace Reape wore many hats – some long term others for a short time. Longest was her Irish Catholic heritage. Grace loved being Irish and Catholic. She loved being a Notre Dame alum – you know, the “Fighting Irish.” She remained a faithful fan all her life, watching their games and cheering them on to victory. She kept in touch with her cousins in Ireland and Dotty from Brooklyn, faithfully remembering them on all holidays. And she kept her Irish sense of humor and hearty laugh all her life.

The distinctive fluted cap and veil of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth adorned the head of Sister Ann John Reape for many years until her red hair once again shone forth above her contemporary outfits after Vatican Council II. Grace was a Sister of Charity for 68 years. She was a vital part of the community and served the mission of charity with distinction and dedication.

Grace wore the helmet of teacher and principal in Visitation School in Paramus, Saint Joseph High School in Paterson, and Saint Cecilia High School in Englewood where she took on the role of principal. It was there that she and Peggy O’Neill were among the first to experiment with living among the lay people in an apartment in Englewood with their landlady, Mrs. Duddy. They were leaders in working for social justice causes.

As Coordinator of the Educational Opportunity Program at the then College of Saint Elizabeth Grace wore many hats – administrator, advocate, activities director, mentor, mother, referee etc. etc. etc...

When she was elected Provincial of the Northern Province during the transition from pre-Vatican Council to post-Vatican religious life sisters in leadership had to keep changing hats to meet the rapidly changing times as we tried to remain true to our founding principles and values and at the same time adapt and renew our lives according to the mandates of Vatican II.

There is life after leadership! And Grace continued to try on different hats. She wore the mortar board of a Master of Divinity from the Maryknoll School of Theology and used that knowledge and experience in a ministerial role at Saint Peter’s Parish in Jersey City. There, as she tended to the religious needs of the parishioners her concern for poor people kept her engaged with the food pantry and the clothing closet. Grace was always concerned for those in need – either physical or spiritual and she responded generously to both.

Her most recent ministry had Grace wearing a hat of compassionate care as a pastoral care minister to hospice patients throughout Hudson County. Although in failing health herself, Grace drove the congested city streets and often had to park at considerable distances from the homes she visited, walking painfully, to bring the comforting word of God to people sorely in need. She helped to prepare them for death and perhaps prepared herself as well. Grace loved that ministry as she related well to the variety of social and ethnic groups, she met each day. Her facility with Spanish was a gift as she was able to communicate with so many more patients and their families. At the same time Grace lived alone in low rent senior housing in Jersey City where she unofficially ministered to the other residents.

For Grace, The Reape hat was most important. She loved her family deeply – her parents with their Irish roots, her sister, Pat, who died tragically in a plane crash in Turkey at too young an age, her brother, John, and sister-in-law Anice and their children John and Colleen who were with Grace when she died. We were so happy to hear that because we know nothing would have made Grace happier. Thank you, John, and Becky, Kilsey,



and Brendan, Colleen and Frank, Connor, Kelly, and Emily and all you cousins and friends and colleagues who have come to pay a final farewell to Grace. Your presence is a tribute of your respect, admiration, and love. And Father Santoro, longtime friend, and neighbor of the Reape family. Thank you for coming to celebrate with us this liturgy of the life and legacy of Grace.

The last hat Grace wore was that of illness and loneliness. Although she was rigorous in following medical advice, Grace's body gradually forced her to give up active ministry and to be limited in her mobility. Although she kept up with her relatives and friends by phone, she spent many hours alone in her apartment reading the homilies and essays of Pope Francis whom she greatly admired. During these periods of isolation Grace was drawn to concern for the whole of creation through her study of "Laudato Si", Pope Francis' encyclical on Care for our Common Home – all of creation. From the bricks and mortar of Jersey City Grace's vision of the mission of charity grew to encompass the whole world.

A woman of prayer all through her life Grace now had time to develop a more intense relationship with God. Like Peter, the apostle, she who had been so active in decision – making about her life was now constrained in what she could do, and decisions had to be made for her. Hard though this was for her, Grace accepted it as she accepted others clearing out her apartment as she was confined at Peace Care – St. Ann's and McAuley Hall. We are very grateful to the caregivers at both facilities for their compassionate and skillful care of Grace during weeks in each place as we are very grateful to the Sisters and Seton associate who helped Grace through her final transition from Jersey City to Watchung and those who helped in the passage from Overlook Hospital to this liturgy and the transfer of her body to Holy Family Cemetery where she will rest among the thousands of faithfully departed Sisters of Charity who have preceded her. This is a good moment to say a public thank you to Steve Priola and his colleagues who with great reverence enable us to celebrate this and all resurrection liturgies for our sisters with love and dignity.

As Grace takes her leave of us, we accompany her with our prayer that God will reward her for the goodness of her life. She will live on in our memory as a faithful Sister of Charity who spread the mission of God's love faithfully for 68 years. Thank you, Grace, may you rest in peace. Amen

Sister Mary Canavan, SC