

## A Sharing of Gifts

*an interview with Nanine Tuller, CSJ*



*“We share ministry with other women and men, seeking through this collaboration to bring to greater fruition the diversity of gifts which the Spirit imparts.”*

CSJ Constitution, pg. 26 #3

Each of us has unique gifts or talents, that when fully developed, can be instrumental in the nurturing and the growth of others.

Nanine Tuller, CSJ, inherited her artistic gifts, which, combined with her calling to serve God, has brought her love of God, and her many talents to all whom she has met, and all to whom she has ministered.

Nanine was born on June 20, 1934, to Kenneth and Margaret Tuller. Her mother was a talented artist, and a fashion designer at Bonwit Teller. Her father worked for the New England Telephone Company. Her family lived in Jamaica Plain and then Milton, MA. In 1938, when Nanine was four, two things happened. Nanine's sister Barbara Jean was born and the family moved to Westfield, NJ, a move prompted by her father's job changed.

In New Jersey, Nanine attended grades 1 - 4 at Holy Trinity School, staffed by the Sisters of Charity of Convent Station until her father was relocated to Haverhill, MA. The family settled in Bradford, MA. Nanine went to Sacred Hearts School, grades 5 – 8; and then attended St. James High School, Haverhill, where she was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph; these experiences deepened her religious beliefs. During her high school years, Nanine could be found making posters, book covers or creating colorful designs for windows during the Christmas season. She loved to volunteer, as did her mother, who encouraged her projects.

After high school, Nanine attended Mass. School of Art. Nanine recalls: “Our mornings consisted of basic college courses, but the last two classes of the day concentrated on one's major. My mother, being an illustrator, felt I should go into illustration, but I was definitely drawn to entering the Sisters of St. Joseph, so I chose teaching as a major.”

During her last year of art school, Nanine contacted the sisters at Bradford, especially Sister Felicitas with whom she had developed a friendship, to inquire about entering the Sisters of St. Joseph. Nanine graduated in June 1957 with a BS in teaching and entered the novitiate in September 1957. She was given the religious name, Sister Kenneth Marie; of that time she said, “It was somewhat different from what I expected. I felt a little segregated because I had already graduated from college. So, while other postulants were in school, I taught art classes at the College of St. Joseph, filling in when needed.” Nanine also taught the novices art appreciation, lettering, and other art techniques.

In 1960, Nanine was missioned to St. Agnes School, Arlington, MA, to teach fifth grade. Two years later, she went to St. Bridget School, Framingham, MA, where she taught grades five and six. While teaching, Nanine attended Assumption College and acquired her Master of Art degree in Teaching Fine Arts in 1965.

It was during this time that Nanine received a phone call from the CSJ Council about the new Scholasticate in Framingham. She and others were asked to submit some stained- glass window options for the Scholasticate chapel. Nanine was selected to design the chapel windows. “I was honored. The work had to be done very quickly; the Congregation wanted it completed by 1964. I was given the Latin titles for each of the eight windows and the images had to be symbolic.” Nanine researched the liturgical symbols and worked with a designer from the Connick Studio in Boston. She chose the symbol of the lily in each of the windows to represent Mary. “It was quite an experience and a challenge. During this whole process, I was teaching regular classes, CCD, and attending graduate school.” On September 22, 1964, a Mass was held at Mater Dei Chapel of the Scholasticate of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Framingham. Eight stained glass windows, designed by Nanine were viewed for the first time.





*Anna Crann, CSJ - I was returning to my home parish, St Catherine, Charlestown, MA and professing my final vows as a Sister of St. Joseph of Boston. The church was filled to overflowing. This was a first, and it came about because Pope John XXIII had the spirit to open wide those wonderful windows. My hope is that the Church will continue to keep the Spirit alive and let the breath of the Spirit be felt again in the hearts of all people.*

In 1966, she was missioned to Fontbonne Academy to establish an art department with full-credit courses. Initially, all the students were required to take one art class. "I did not expect everyone to be able to have the same level of talent, so I encouraged them to observe design in nature and works of art." Art assignments entailed print making, weaving, sculpture and art appreciation. Students with exceptional talent were encouraged to pursue drawing and painting techniques.



Nanine's father became ill in 1980. Leona Hoey was hired to teach with her part-time, which allowed Nanine to spend time at home. It was a blessing. "I felt the support of the faculty and the Fontbonne sisters." This went on for almost eight years.

From 1994 – 1995, Nanine took a sabbatical, beginning in California, where her sister Barbara Jean and her family were living. While there she attended classes at a sculpture studio. She then traveled to Italy, where she observed European art and culture.

Returning from her sabbatical, Nanine took a position at St. Clare High School, Roslindale, MA as an art teacher. She was delighted to have equipment for a pottery studio donated by Regis College. She remained there until the school closed in 2002. Nanine then volunteered at St. Angela's, Mattapan, MA and taught art



to grades 1 - 8 for the next five years. "I enjoyed that experience. I was able to correlate art with what the students were learning in other classes."

Nanine's enthusiasm for art, along with her talent for calligraphy, has been a gift to the community over the years. She continues to work on cards and designs as well as helping to decorate for Jubilees and other

celebrations at Fontbonne Convent.

**Q:** How did Vatican II affect you?

**A.** Some of the things that changed for me following Vatican II were the change of habit and return to my Baptismal name, Nanine. My life was enriched by our liturgical lectures and updated insights into the theology and theologians of the day. The freedom of Vatican II allowed me to care for my parents during their illness until they both died in 1983. All this helped me on my journey to discover a new way of being in relationship with my God. †

*\*Side note: One of the directives from the Vatican II documents was that schools or academies of sacred art should be founded in those parts of the world where they could be useful, so that artists may be trained. The Council prompted more awareness of good art, sacred art, and liturgical art. The beautiful stained glass windows at Mater Dei Chapel and the integration of an art department at Fontbonne Academy are two examples of how Nanine was able to share her artistic gifts with others, a direct result of Vatican II.*