



## Sister Gabriel Kenny CJ

1919-2021

by Sister Ann Stafford CJ

Mary Kate Kenny was born on 16 July 1919 in Kilmore on the Mayo/Roscommon border.

She had an idyllic upbringing on a farm with two sisters and a brother. Her parents were devoted to their Catholic faith which they passed on to their children. Sr Gabriel talked about her love of animals which were on the farm – cows, sheep, hens and geese and of course horses. She had an encounter with a mother goose when she picked up her baby and was almost killed – she bore the scar for the rest of her life on her forehead.

Her sister Bridget went to Hampstead as an au pair. She was so taken and impressed by the sisters she met, she decided to join the Community. Mary Kate joined her sister, now called Baptist, in Ascot where the Novitiate was situated. She said she got great support from her sister and felt very welcomed by the Community's kindness. This helped her to overcome her huge homesickness. Her parents missed her very much – the house was much quieter without her. Her mother wrote wonderful letters encouraging her in her religious life.

Mary Kate, now known as Gabriel, joined the Community just before the second world war. She found this time very frightening. She was at Ascot until she joined the Community in Shaftesbury after the war – where she was very happy in the midst of the countryside once more. The school had moved there from Bratton and the early days were spent setting up

the classrooms, varnishing chairs and tackling other necessary jobs preparing beds for boarders and making Coombe House welcome for new occupants.

She left Shaftesbury for a short sojourn in Hampstead, returning to Ascot in 1955 where she spent the next 45 years. Here she was responsible for the school refectory followed by the laundry and all that entailed including mending clothes. On top of a busy day's work, she slept alongside the youngest children in the school. All of this she did with cheerfulness and generosity and a winning smile. A comment came from a child who have her 2 pictures on her feast day – Gabriel 'Are you sure you meant to give me 2 pictures'. The response 'Yes because you are with us in the day and the night'.

Sr Gabriel retired from school duties in 2000 and had some well-earned retirement at Ascot with her beloved Sr Baptist before moving to Hampstead for a further 3 years. Here, she was able to enjoy visits from her cousins in London and live a more gentle life.

In 2007 she moved with her sister to St Joseph's here in York. Sadly, she had only a very short time with Sr Baptist who died in 2008. Life was lonely then for Gabriel without the love and support of her much loved sister. However, her faith was strong. Her ministry was now that of prayer and quiet acceptance of her illness and disability. She got the best of care and attention from the loving staff for which we are all so grateful.

Gabriel will be remembered for her kindness, gentleness, unselfishness but most of all for her wonderful smile. Thank you Gabriel for a well lived life and for your total generosity in the Lord's vineyard.

I will end by saying Sr Gabriel's favourite prayer which she said each night in the dorm:

'Visit we beseech Thee O Lord, this house and family.

Drive far away from it the snares of the enemy.

May your blessing be upon us, Lord, as we place all our trust in You.'