**EULOGY**

**Sister John Martin Fixa, O.P.**

*May 9, 1940 - October 27, 2018*

This morning we celebrate and remember Sister John Martin Fixa, our beloved Sister Johnnie. She embraced us by her friendship and enfolded us with her love. We gather to pray for her and thank God for her extraordinary life.

On May 9, 1940, John Fixa and Kathleen Egan rejoiced in the birth of their newborn daughter, Judith Ann, who was baptized one month later at St. James Parish in the Mission District of San Francisco. That same month Judy's parents took her to the chapel of Immaculate Conception Priory where the Dominican Sisters joined them in giving thanks to God for the birth of their long-awaited child. Judy attended St. James School from kindergarten through eighth grade. In elementary school, young Judy grew to love and admire her teachers, the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose. Her parents were active members of St. James Parish, and daily prayer, weekly recitation of the rosary, and devotion to the Dominican Sisters were a vital part of Judy's youth.

Judy attended Immaculate Conception Academy, San Francisco, where the Dominican Sisters continued to be an influential part of her life. During these years Judy developed leadership skills, serving as class president for three years. She also considered different careers, moving from her second grade goal of nursing to her sophomore interest in nightclub singing! However, there was one influence that moved her heart to a life choice--the joy of life she experienced in the lives of the Dominican Sisters who were her teachers.

On September 7, 1958, three months after her high school graduation, Judy entered the convent at the Motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters in Mission San Jose. For Judy, who was a single child, this experience gave her a new family of hundreds of sisters "in a snap," as she liked to explain it. From that day forward, she said, "My Congregation is my family." She developed a special closeness with the Sisters who entered the convent with her and delighted in their custom of holding annual reunions every year. On June 13, 1959, Judy began her novitiate and received the name Sister John Martin. She chose the name John in honor of her father and the name Martin in honor of the beloved Dominican lay brother who selflessly cared for the poor of Lima, Peru, in the 16th century. On June 24, 1960, Sister John Martin made her first profession of vows as a Dominican Sister.

After four years of religious and spiritual formation at the Motherhouse, Sister John Martin began her ministry as an elementary and secondary teacher. She taught first and second grade at School of the Madeleine, Berkeley; sixth and seventh grade at St. William's School, Los Altos; and fourth grade at St. Joseph School, Portland, Oregon. For six years Sister taught English, religion and journalism at St. Elizabeth High School, Oakland, where she also moderated the school paper, The Thuringian, and led her students to regional and national prizes in newspaper competitions. Sister Johnnie imparted not only her daily lessons but shared a heartfelt love for her students that blossomed over the years into many friendships that lasted until her death. With affection she called her students, "my kids." She visited and corresponded with many of her "kids" as they matured, raised families, celebrated joys, grieved losses, and suffered frightening illnesses.

In 1976, the Dominican Sisters asked Sister John Martin to extend her gifts beyond the classroom to school administration by serving as principal of her alma mater, Immaculate Conception Academy. With energy and determination, she accepted the challenge. Returning to ICA, she observed that Our Lady's grotto in the school garden was very neglected. Sister Johnnie promised Mary that she would take care of the garden if Mary would take care of the school. Every Saturday morning during her first year as principal, Sister's father, who had been postmaster of San Francisco for 17 years, joined his daughter in beautifying Mary's grotto. Soon the need for many other physical improvements of the campus became apparent. To celebrate the school's centenary in 1983, Sister John Martin launched a major fundraising campaign for the construction of a new building on the school's corner property; it would include a gym, three classrooms, a computer lab, small chapel and two offices. With a keen sense for the future of the school, faith that she was doing the Lord's work, and the support of her father who introduced her to foundations and friends, Sister Johnnie spearheaded a major building campaign. She involved her students who broke records selling over $400,000 of the World's Finest Chocolate, while she began forming friendships with new benefactors throughout the city. With spirited support from her Dominican Sisters and astute guidance from Sister Donna Johnson, the treasurer of ICA, the school raised $3.2 million dollars. The project became known as the "Miracle of the Mission." How did it happen? Sister Johnnie herself explained that she followed her dream, believed, prayed, and worked hard. On May 13, 1986, which Sister Johnnie always noted was the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima, the school dedicated the new building. Seven hundred guests were expected for the event, but 1,100 arrived, demonstrating the most important secret of Sister Johnnie's success--the blessing of friends who believe in the mission.

After 14 amazing and very demanding years at ICA, Sister Johnnie acknowledged her need to re-energize herself spiritually, intellectually, physically and socially. From 1990-1991 she participated in a sabbatical at the Institute for Spirituality and Worship at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

At the same time that Sister John Martin completed her sabbatical, the Dominican Sisters were increasingly concerned about the financial viability of the parish schools that they staffed. To address this situation, the Congregation established the Office of School Development and appointed Sister John Martin to serve as Development Consultant to twenty-three schools. At the Sisters' General Chapter in 1995, the Sisters approved a bold plan to support eight inner-city schools for three years by establishing three regional development offices, hiring three regional development directors, and providing initial funding through the Dominican Sisters Foundation. This project led to the formation of Dominican Sisters Vision of Hope which Sister Johnnie launched in 1995 and guided until 2015. She gave herself wholeheartedly to Vision of Hope which was firmly based on the mission given the Dominican Sisters by their foundress Mother Maria Pia Backes: to serve the young, the poor and the vulnerable. She reached out to school administrators and taught them how to find funding resources and insisted that the core of development was not fundraising but friend raising. She gradually formed an advisory board of persons who believed in the mission. Soon, however, Sister Johnnie discerned that Vision of Hope needed an endowment. Despite the counsel of some advisors who thought her goal was too ambitious, Sister Johnnie announced the goal: Vision of Hope would raise $8,000,000 for an endowment so that a percentage of earnings could be sent annually to each Vision of Hope School. Through many relationships, great faith and much prayer, the goal was met. Here it is important to recall Sister Johnnie's perspective about such impressive fund raising accomplishments: Two years ago, she said, "I've raised a fair amount of money, but I don't want to be remembered for the amount of money I've received. The important 'M' word is mission--to love the mission, to have passion for the mission!"

In recognition of her legendary work for Catholic education, especially for the poor, Sister John Martin received three public awards. On October 4, 2007 at St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco, Archbishop George Niederauer presented to her the Assumpta Award, given to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the life of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and like Mary have sought to follow Christ in all things. In a tribute to Sister John Martin that evening, her friend and benefactor, Mrs. Dede Wilsey, president of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, captured the experience of Sister Johnnie the fund raiser: "She is a master fund raiser and since 1982 I have personally watched her explain, cajole, rationalize, negotiate and generally wear down prospective donors until they capitulate under her relentless yet pious persistence. And as they ask, 'Sister, is this a large enough gift to take care of your children?' those of us who know her and love her can see from the twinkle in those Irish eyes that she will be back for more." In 2015, the St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Archdiocese of San Francisco honored Sister John Martin, presenting to her the Brennan Award, given to an individual whose personal action has had an extraordinary impact on those in need in San Francisco. Last spring in April 2017, Sacred Heart High School, Los Angeles, selected Sister Johnnie to receive the Mother Maria Pia award for the extraordinary way that she fulfilled Mother Pia's mission to serve the young, the poor and the vulnerable.

Beyond the biographical outline of Sister John Martin's life, there are hundreds of Sister Johnnie stories brimming in the memory of everyone gathered here today. The stories recount Johnnie's vacations and trips from Morro Bay to Dublin Bay, parties celebrating Mom Fixa's 100th birthday and Johnnie's 75th, set reunions and set jubilees, quiet personal conversations and high energy line dancing, the memorable sight of the signature purple sweater in a crowd of black and white. So much joy! So much life! But there is one memory, one somber day, in the Sister Johnnie story that marks a turning point.

On November 23, 2011, Sister John Martin was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. Sister Johnnie faced her diagnosis with faith and an upbeat spirit. She regularly wrote emails to her Sisters and friends to share the progress of her treatment plan. Incredibly, Sister Johnnie's devotion to the mission never wavered, and she adjusted her responsibilities around the calendar of her chemotherapy. One day she announced that her cancer was a gift that had opened a whole new ministry of comfort and love as she reached out to other cancer patients whom she met in the medical offices of her oncologist. In 2016, Sister Johnnie went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, a Marian shrine in France. She heard that everyone who goes to Lourdes experiences a miracle. At that holy site, Sister John Martin received her miracle, a profound religious experience. One evening almost 25,000 pilgrims were encircling the shrine praying the rosary. In the evening darkness, the pilgrims held torches that they raised high above their heads each time they sang the traditional antiphon in praise of Mary, "Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria." Enraptured in the light and love of that great assembly giving thanks to God and praising Mary, Sister John Martin recounted: "My body could not hold my soul. It just expanded. This is Corpus Christi! It's a spiritual paradise. Everyone had hope. Everyone believed. Everyone loved God."

Two years later, throughout this past summer, our Sister Johnnie's medical condition began to worsen. Despite a downturn in her health, Sister Johnnie traveled to Dublin, Ireland, on August 21 to attend the Golden Jubilee of her cousin, Sister of Mercy Mary Reynolds. After participating in the joyous celebration, health concerns required her hospitalization in Ireland. She returned to her community at St. Elizabeth Convent, Oakland, on September 25 but was hospitalized again on September 31. Early Thursday morning, October 25, Sister Johnnie made a decision about her ongoing heath care.  After seven years of valiantly fighting cancer, she decided to begin hospice care. She left the hospital and returned to St. Elizabeth Community on Friday, October 26. In the early morning hours of Saturday, October 27, Sister took a turn for the worse. That afternoon, Sister Cecilia Canales, Congregational Prioress, led the prayers for the dying as the community of Sisters at St. Elizabeth and the community of Sisters at the Motherhouse--through a telephone connection--sang the Salve Regina, the traditional hymn sung by Dominicans for a Sister who is dying. Our Sister Johnnie was peaceful, even raising her arms briefly trying to hug those at her bedside. Surrounded by the love of Sisters and friends, she went home to God at 7:00 p.m. on October 27.

We will miss our Sister Johnnie very much. She blessed so many with her inclusive love! Two years before she died, Sister John Martin opened up her heart about how she loved: "[My greatest value] is unconditional love. God calls all of us to that, and it's not easy. For me, loving is easy. I see good in everybody. I see God's image in everybody. It's not hard for me to identify goodness. But unconditional love calls for more, and I think we're all called to that." Sister Johnnie's moving spiritual wisdom, nurtured by her faithfulness to spiritual direction in the midst a demanding ministry, gives us testimony that her expansive love of neighbor came from a heart deeply in love with God. When the Sisters of her community reflected on which Gospel passage to select for this funeral Mass, it is not surprising that they selected the Gospel of John and the last words that Jesus prayed to the Father for his friends at the Last Supper: "*May the love with which you loved me be in them*." Let us conclude this remembrance with the final words, a blessing, that Sister Johnnie wrote in her last Christmas letter:

"*May we each do our part*

*to BE the love and to live the peace*

*God so desires for our world.*

*Thank you for the personal witness of your faith and love,*

*which is both gift and inspiration to me!*

*You have a special place in my heart!"*

*--Sister Mary Catherine Antczak, OP*

*November 3, 2018*