



## Joan Ronan McDonald

July 17, 1932 - June 28, 2017

Wonderful Words of Life (composed by Philip O. Bliss, 1874)

Sing them over again to me,  
Wonderful words of life,  
Let me more of their beauty see,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Words of life and beauty  
Teach me faith and duty.

Refrain:

Beautiful words, wonderful words,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Beautiful words, wonderful words,  
Wonderful words of life.

Christ, the blessed One, gives to all  
Wonderful words of life;  
Sinner, list to the loving call,  
Wonderful words of life;  
All so freely given,  
Wooing us to heaven.

(Refrain)

Sweetly echo the Gospel call,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Offer pardon and peace to all,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Jesus, only Savior,  
Sanctify us forever.

(Refrain)

My mom would often use this hymn during services she would hold while working as a chaplain at Bon Secours/Cottage Hospital for the better part of a decade. This hymn resonated deeply with the staff and patients, but its greatest impact was on my mother. She would turn to this hymn during trying times in her life, for it would lift up her spirits whenever she prayed to God for support. The words are life affirming with a simple melody, and today the hymn is a gospel standard. I have thought of this hymn a lot over the last week in coping with the death of my mother, A. Joan R. McDonald. She died on June 28, 2017, free of pain and at peace, while being cared for at home by her family.

My mom was born on July 17, 1932 in Yonkers, New York, the first child and only daughter of James F. and Dorothy S. Ronan. Her only brother, James F. Ronan Jr., was born in 1938 and died in 2013. My mother had a wonderful childhood, full of fond memories. She was especially close with her father who was an intellect and master story teller, philosopher, and taught my mom about the history of great literature. She became a voracious reader. He also taught her Latin which served her well throughout life. There was no one she was more proud of or loved more than her father. One story my mom shared was in the summer before college began, she would stay up late polishing her

father's shoes so that she would be awake when he arrived home from work and they could talk about life. She would make him dinner as he regaled her with many a story that always had life lessons for her to ponder. Those were precious times for my mom, and she treasured them above all else. Growing up in post war NYC was the golden age in the theater, and a favorite past time of hers was to see the latest Broadway shows, always at a Saturday matinee.

My mom received full scholarships to Hunter College in NYC, Ohio University for graduate studies, and Wayne State University for her doctoral work. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from all. Later in life, she studied sign language at Gallaudate College in Washington, D.C., and later continued that subject at Madonna University. The purpose was to improve her communication skills with the deaf children she worked with as an audiologist at the Detroit Day School for the Deaf.

My mother married Thomas C. McDonald on June 20, 1957 and together they had five sons: Sean, Liam, Keir, Gavin, and Colin (deceased). This past June marked 60 years of marriage for my parents. She would have been 85 on July 17, 2017.

My mom retired from the Detroit Public Schools in 1995. During her first year of retirement, as she reflected back on her life, she realized that her parish and committee work in the church had been heavily pastoral. She had been appointed to the Presiding Bishop's Task Force on Accessibility in 1988, and worked closely with Nanette Carpenter in the Diocese of Michigan over a number of years, to help all churches become handicapped accessible. My mom also was a co-founder of the Episcopal Mental Illness Network in the early 1990's. She also was a former vestry member, confirmation instructor, lay reader, sub-deacon, healing minister, was licensed to give sermons as a lay person, and was a long time member of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul

in Detroit. She also was the radio announcer for the 11 a.m. services from the Cathedral that were broadcast live on WWJ 760 in the late 1980's.

She was a social activist, having been arrested twice for civil disobedience, once for trespassing at Williams International in Walled Lake, and the other for protesting the Iraq war after 9/11. My mother belonged to Pax Christi, the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. She was also a former board member of the roundtable of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Detroit. At age 64, my mom discerned a new call in pastoral care and began a two year CPE program (clinical pastoral education,) becoming the chaplain at Bon Secours/Cottage Hospitals.

My mom had many friends who loved her dearly. They all said that my mom had helped them through very difficult times in their lives. She was a confident and friend to many people. She was full of kindness and compassion. One person said she was the most ethical and empathic person they had ever known. While working as a chaplain, she would say she prayed with the staff as much as the patients.

My mom took up Israel Folk Dancing in the late 1990's. She loved to dance, but also felt the group gave her spiritual meaning. She would say that the dancing went back to pre-Christianity when Jews were the first people to have one God. She felt this connection to Jesus' time. The dancing also helped her through the tragic death of her youngest child in 1998. Her dance teacher, Sunny Segal, brought pure joy to each class. My mom could be having a terrible day, be sad and/or tired, and Sunny, with her exuberant personality, would lift up my mom's spirit with dance. Over time, my mother said that without dance, she would have had a much harder time coping with Colin's death, and was grateful to God for making this connection with Sunny happen.

My mom was also a gourmet chef, baker, gifted artist, basket weaver, spun

her own yarn using a spinning wheel, weaved intricate patterns when using those yarns on her loom, calligraphy, stamped elegant cards, drew exquisite mandalas, and had an enormous talent as a photographer using her beloved Leica camera. She literally traveled the globe, with many trips to the Middle East and Russia during her lifetime. Thousands upon thousands of photographs serve as a visual diary of her many travels.

My mom, A. Joan R. McDonald, is in heaven, this I know. She is with God, Jesus, all the Saints, and is reunited with her father, mother, brother, her youngest son. I will miss my beautiful mom who was so full of life and love for the rest of my life. I know I will see her again, and my love for her, with the rest of my family, is eternal.

~Liam Thomas McDonald, July 5, 2017.

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My mother, A. Joan R. McDonald, had expressed to me that all she wanted included in the program for her service was a reprinting of her profile and remarks made when she was honored by the Michigan Interfaith Fund in November 2006. Both are included below.

Liam Thomas McDonald

Joan R. McDonald was a retired educational audiologist for the Detroit Day School for the Deaf, and a long time member of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Detroit. She realized early on in her retirement that her ministry in church and committee work was pastoral, and began a two year CPE (clinical pastoral education) program for chaplains. Joan became the staff chaplain for Bon Secours/Cottage Hospitals for over a decade. Joan vividly remembered the Episcopal General Convention in Detroit in 1988 and Bishop H. Coleman McGehee's passionate vision for community development lending, a concrete

way the church could help improve the stark reality of poverty. This vision touched Joan's heart, as she knew firsthand the struggle of poor families and how they needed to make a dignified living to make ends meet while she worked for the Detroit Public Schools. She knew she needed to be part of this ministry, but with five children and working part time, she did not have funds available to make even a small investment. Joan discovered that donations were just as important to the Fund and could provide permanent equity in the loan fund. She began a dedicated monthly giving program that continued over thirteen years amounting to more than \$13,000 dollars. In 2002, Joan was able to make an investment in the Fund from an inheritance she received that became a gift upon her death. It was Joan's faithful journey to help others in any way possible that resulted in being honored with the Equity Contributor Award. Joan often said that "My call has not been to the big stuff. What I am called to do in my life is this - I touch individual lives one life at a time."

#### Reflections for Michigan Interfaith Trust Fund Economic Justice Dinner

The voyage of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but the decision to start the journey is what sets it in motion. Decisions to embark on a new journey, a desire to look at things with "new eyes" can be an internal prodding, an intuitive sense that something needs to change, or heightened awareness of "what needs to be done" can come about because of voices in our midst that challenge us. Voices of community that call us to action will be life changing on so many levels. For me the call to action was twofold - first a call from Bishop McGehee and second a call from Jane Carpenter.

Bishop McGehee's call to mission was a vision that would help bring healing and wholeness to individuals and communities in the inner-city for those folk who were normally excluded from borrowing money and realizing dreams to incarnate God's vision of an abundant life for everyone, everyone in the here

and now! I wanted desperately to be part of this new journey in mission, but as I did not have even enough money for the minimal amount acceptable to be an investor, I figured I'd have to let go of my own hopes to be part of the dream. However, in subsequent conversations with Jane Carpenter at a time when we were both deeply involved with the life of the Diocese of Michigan, she said that if I wanted to make occasional cash contributions to the Fund, it would be extremely helpful. Jane's call to me was a call to individual commitment which I initially thought wasn't really necessary as I wanted to be an investor!

So that's how I started quite a number of years ago. Every month I set aside money for the fund, just as I did for housing, car, food, utilities, etc. and it really didn't take long for it to just be part of the monthly routine. I have read so many articles on how the Fund changes lives, and am amazed and humbled to see how my modest contribution have helped make this happen. There is no beginning too small, and you alone will know what is right for you, for it only takes a spark to get a fire going. Shalom!

Joan Ronan McDonald, November 2006

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

JUL 15. 11:00 AM (ET)

The Cathedral Church of St. Paul  
4800 Woodward Avenue  
Detroit, MI 48201

# Tribute Wall

JH

“ *Liam,  
Ray and I would like to offer you our deepest  
sympathies to you for the loss of your dear  
mother. We hope for you peace in the days to  
come.*

*Jenny Heidloff  
<http://storage.lifetributes.com/Gifts/Dove.png>*



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**jenny heidloff** - July 15, 2017 at 05:22 PM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the  
family of Joan Ronan McDonald.*



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July 14, 2017 at 03:27 PM

DK

“ Dear Liam,

*Thank you for sharing your mom’s “Wonderful Words of Life!” They are a lasting legacy that she has bestowed upon you, your family and on many others like me, who have benefitted from her journey. I hope that the following on-line musical link is accessible [cut and paste] to you and others to appreciate and cherish in memory of your mom:*

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCzZsIfbBEM>.*

*Thank you for the loving tribute to your mom that you expressed in your obituary. It provides us with a more complete picture of the many gifts that your mom gladly shared. Her life is an inspiration and an invitation to us to develop and use all of our talents (Matthew 25: 14-23): “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”*

*I met Joan McDonald at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul one Sunday in the spring of 1984. On that Sunday, I left in the middle of a 9:30 AM Roman Catholic Mass, drove to the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in time for the 11:00 AM Eucharist, and was welcomed afterwards by Dean Bertram Herlong. The dean introduced me to Joan McDonald who cordially invited me to join her as she introduced me to others for Fellowship. From then on, Joan and I became friends. I later met Liam and more of Joan’s sons. Because of Joan, I found a welcoming community where using your talents was encouraged and treasured.*

*Joan, others and I worked creating many processional and liturgical banners to celebrate the seasons of Advent and Easter. We prepared special liturgies, participated in educational forums, and celebrated special local and diocesan events at the cathedral. We shared meals and many happy times with our liturgical banner-making team. Joan also appreciated St. Francis of Assisi and*

*shared a joyful musical interpretation of his life whose theme was  
"Party, Party, Party!"*

*For Joan, although saints have challenges, they find and share joy  
in their own "Wonderful Words of Life."*

*The Christmas cards that Joan sent are definitely keepers. They are  
Joan's artistic expression of her spiritual legacy.*

*Although I cannot join you in person as you remember and  
celebrate Joan's life, on July 15, I will remember Joan and you from  
Chicago in thought and prayer at that time and in the days ahead.*

*May the Lord grant comfort to all of us who mourn Joan's passing –  
That Joan's transition from this life may, in faith, be a transfiguration  
in company with Him.*

*Denny Kecso*

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**Dennis (Denny) Kecso** - July 09, 2017 at 06:11 PM