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Sr. Donna Quinn (Courtesy of Lake Claremont Press)

by Mary E. Hunt

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August 27, 2021

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Sinsinawa Dominican Sr. Donna Quinn, longtime feminist social justice advocate, died July 30 at the age of 84. She was a pioneer, well ahead of her time and of many of her peers on women's issues in church and society. Donna was tireless, stalwart, a proverbial force of nature, though even nature gives up every once in a while. Donna never did.

She joined the order at age 18, went about the studies and teaching that were customary in those days, working in grade schools in four states before she realized that her heart was not in the classroom. Donna spent the next four decades advocating for the well-being of women and children, especially those who were poor.

I met Donna in the early 1980s through the Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of Catholic-rooted feminist groups that live out egalitarian, inclusive and intersectional visions of justice. We worked together on countless committees and projects; Donna was always pushing the envelope. Exactly zero of the goals we set have come to fruition — women's equality in Catholic ministry and decision making; women's reproductive justice; LGBTQIA+ safety and respect, among others. But life in the struggle with Women-Church colleagues is unique because we are not requesting admission to a patriarchal structure nor begging for dignity. We assume our full humanity and seek to create structures and movements that allow others to do the same.

Donna's early role models and colleagues included Margaret Ellen Traxler, a School Sister of Notre Dame who marched for civil rights in Selma and founded the Institute for Women Today to assist poor women in Chicago. Another was Dominican Sr. Marjorie Tuite, whose portfolio included international ecumenical work in Nicaragua and with Church Women United, as well as myriad domestic efforts to end racism, war and sexism.

Like Donna, they signed the "Catholic Statement on Pluralism and Abortion," an ad published in The New York Times on Oct. 7, 1984, that claimed committed Catholics had the right to discuss abortion without censure, a public retort to Cardinal John O'Connor who preached against the candidacy of pro-choice Catholic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro. Two years earlier, Traxler and Donna were among four sisters who appeared on "The Phil Donahue Show," where they also

supported abortion rights.

Vatican reprisals against the nearly 100 signers were swift and vicious. The 24 nuns who signed were insulted by the fact that church officials would not negotiate directly with them but only through their religious superiors long after that style of top-down leadership had changed in most congregations. Donna learned a lot from that fray and deepened in her commitment to be a Catholic feminist presence in the world.

Donna's family history provides some clues to her priorities. Her mother was a Flynn, her father a Quinn. So her Irish, South Side of Chicago, Catholic and Democratic roots were deep, including a passion for the White Sox that led her to celebrate her golden jubilee at a baseball game. Donna loved her high school classmates with whom she stayed in touch to the end of her life.

She was the middle child with an older, beloved brother, Bill, who became a diocesan priest, and a younger sister, Joyce, who joined and eventually left the Sinsinawa Dominicans. Her mother died in childbirth along with the baby when Donna was 11, a tender age to lose a parent. I wonder if that deep pain motivated in part her courageous pro-choice work in hopes that other women would be spared reproduction-related traumas.

Donna served on the committee that set up the first meeting in 1975 in Detroit that founded the Women's Ordination Conference on whose board she later served. She was an early adopter of the idea of women's ordination, though she grew to reject any hierarchy whether populated by women or men.

She was committed to LGBTQIA+ justice, often collaborating with her friend Rick Garcia who became a Chicago-based activist with her encouragement. She was early on that front too, voicing Catholic pro-queer support when few Catholics, especially priests and members of religious orders, would open their mouths. As a coordinator of the National Coalition of American Nuns, Donna made her voice heard wherever she could on justice issues that the hierarchical church negated or ignored.

Her 25 years of leadership with Chicago Catholic Women demonstrated her ability to convene people and her tenacity to push unpopular positions despite backlash. Chicago Catholic Women worked with ecumenical colleagues to support marginalized women and children in the city. Donna brought in educational speakers, hosted fundraising luncheons and issued statements in support of those

without access and power.

She had her innings with Cardinal John Cody, who was horrified by the notion of empowered Catholic women. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin refused to authorize girls as altar servers. Donna and company organized a grandmothers' protest that got his attention. He backed off of the enforcement of his dictum.

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One of her major concerns was that women have access to birth control and abortion. So it was no surprise when she donned a "Clinic Escort" vestment, as it were, and accompanied women in Hinsdale, Illinois, who sought care at a local clinic that provided a range of health services including legal abortion. Rosary-toting protesters harassed women en route to their appointments. Donna's ministry was sensationalized by a right-wing Catholic group that saw it as mortal sin, especially because of her membership in a canonical religious community. Her presence was a source of comfort and support for many women.

Regardless of one's view of abortion, and there are many among committed Catholics of all stripes, Donna acted in good faith by her own lights. Institutional church officials put pressure on her to halt her work, and on her community to sanction her if she did not cease and desist. Donna eventually stopped her regular shifts at the clinic, primarily to keep her community from unwanted episcopal attention and not because she changed her views. To the contrary, she was long active in the Illinois chapter of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, bringing a Catholic presence where it was not often felt.

Women-Church was the Catholic-rooted movement that Donna considered to be her church. She could be her fully Irish Catholic self, not just steaming mad over a papal pronouncement or some foolish move by bishops, but a religious agent living out what she believed. For Donna, Eucharist was when people got together to celebrate the goodness of creation and the struggles to minimize the damage of a patriarchal church, and at the same time build movements for justice and solidarity. She celebrated that Eucharist "early and often," to borrow a Chicago phrase.

It cannot have been easy to be Donna Quinn with all of the expectations of the Irish South Side of what a "real nun" is, how "good Catholic women" are supposed to

behave. Ann Halloran, a Sinsinawa Dominican friend of Donna's, spoke movingly at the community's prayer service about Donna as a beloved and challenging member. Ann acknowledged that the community was pressured by church officials to dismiss Donna. To their eternal credit, the Sinsinawa Dominicans never did. By the same token, I am sure that Donna felt like leaving the community on more than one occasion. Yet she stayed too. The whole story is an instructive case study in feminist, sisterly fidelity.

Donna wrote *Chicago Catholic Women: Its Role in Founding the Catholic Women's Movement* (Lake Claremont Press, 2016), giving a detailed account of how the movement grew. Her archives at the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership at Loyola University Chicago are meticulously prepared files that document how some American Catholic women grew from second-class citizens in submission to the church hierarchy to autonomous, proactive and interconnected individuals and groups that seek to create a new social and spiritual fabric.

The resurrected Donna Quinn, a new concept, is something to celebrate.

We see shades of Donna in Catholic women who engage in the ministries that Donna supported from the early 1970s before they were as obvious and accepted as they are now.

The resurrected Donna is reflected in every young girl who speaks up rather than acquiesce to male power.

Donna is present in Catholic LGBTQIA+ young people whose self-worth is bolstered because Donna picketed and lobbied for human rights.

Donna's newly inspirited life touches every woman who accesses safe, legal, medically necessary reproductive health care because a publicly pro-choice nun had the courage to be a Catholic presence on the frontlines of an abortion clinic and in a statewide ecumenical group dedicated to reproductive justice.

The resurrected Donna Quinn lives in the hearts of young Dominican sisters and their friends who will complete the good work she began in ways we can scarcely imagine today.

The resurrected Donna Quinn invites the rest of us to live such that we leave equally rich legacies when we transform into our resurrected selves.

[Mary E. Hunt is a feminist theologian who is co-founder and co-director of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) in Silver Spring, Maryland.]