



**Sister Miriam P. Cooney, CSC
(Sister Miriam Patrick)**

May 6, 1925 – December 16, 2020

Entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross from Niles, Michigan on July 31, 1942
Initial profession of vows on February 2, 1945

Marie Curie, the renowned nineteenth century French scientist, observed that life is not easy, saying “But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something....” Sister Miriam P. Cooney was gifted and sure of herself. But she instilled confidence in others, especially young women, and persevered in her religious vocation for 78 years in Holy Cross. In the first hours of December 16, 2020 Sister died at Saint Mary’s Convent, Notre Dame, Indiana. There was a light dusting of snow on the ground by daybreak at the motherhouse.

Mary Patricia Cooney’s confidence may have come from being the eldest child of parents Walter J. Cooney and Catherine R. McGuinness Cooney when she was born in South Bend, Indiana on May 6, 1925. Her father was an engineer for the Michigan Central Railroad and her mother was a homemaker and a milliner. The family also included her younger siblings: Kevin, James, Susan, and Kathleen. Mary grew up in Niles, Michigan, attending Saint Mary’s Grade School. During her high school years, she lived with her grandparents in Michigan City, Indiana, while attending Saint Mary’s High School staffed by the Sisters of the Holy Cross. From an early age she had a strong desire to be a religious sister. As a junior in high school, she applied for admission to the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Notre Dame, Indiana and entered the Congregation the summer after her graduation in 1942. At the time of her reception of the holy habit in 1943, she became known as Sister Miriam Patrick, receiving an alternate form of her baptismal name. In 1992 she asked to be known as Sister Miriam P. Cooney, CSC. Friends and colleagues have called her Sister Miriam.

Sister Miriam Patrick’s first teaching experience was as a high school instructor of mathematics at St. Angela Academy in Morris, Illinois, from 1946-1950. In 1950 she began a long tenure as a professor of mathematics at Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana. She earned a B.S. degree in mathematics from Saint Mary’s College in 1951 and a master’s degree in mathematics from the University of Notre Dame in 1953. Three years of leave from Saint Mary’s College for study at the University of Chicago from 1961-1964 culminated in two degrees. She was awarded a master’s degree in the Physical Sciences in 1963 and a doctorate degree in Mathematics in 1968. The same year she was appointed Chair of the Mathematics Department at Saint Mary’s College, a position she held for 23 years. Her peers recognized her as an outstanding department leader and teacher who sought to advance the mission of the college.

During the 1950’s, Sister Miriam Patrick was invited by Sister M. Madeleva (Wolff), CSC, Saint Mary’s College President, to assist her in establishing the first Development Department at the college by

serving as vice-president for the department. Working together, they became good friends. Sister Miriam Patrick did extensive international travel for the college while serving in these positions.

Throughout her professional life, Sister Miriam Patrick was passionate about raising awareness of women's leadership in society, especially women's contributions to mathematics and science. Here are some notable examples of her efforts. In 1982 with a Lilly Foundation grant for curriculum revision, she developed a seminar on women in mathematics and science which became a standard offering in the Women's Studies department of Saint Mary's College. Next, she worked with Sister Stephanie Sloyan, RSM, on a Smithsonian Institute project which resulted in a published study in 1986 titled *Directory of Women Religious in Higher Education*. In 1991 she initiated at Saint Mary's College what became an annual event, Hypatia Day, named after a female Greek mathematician. On that day high school girls explore STEM careers by shadowing math and science students at the college. As Sister Miriam P. Cooney, she was project director and editor for The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics which published a book in 1996. *Celebrating Women in Mathematics and Science* was written by teachers who had participated in a seminar she offered in 1991-92 entitled "Mathematics, Science, and Gender". Sister had hoped to publish a book herself about women in mathematics but difficulties with publishers prevented its realization. In 2012 Sister Miriam submitted her extensive research on the subject to the Women and Leadership Archives (WLA) at Loyola University Chicago. Part of her research featured a series on religious women in mathematics. The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Mundelein College Chicago founded the WLA prior to the merger with Loyola.

Sister Miriam took a semester sabbatical in 1980 from Saint Mary's College which she spent in Ireland with her mother while also teaching a mathematics course at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth in County Kildare. During a second sabbatical in the 1995-96 academic year she visited family and friends in New England, Canada, Uganda, and Tanzania and spent a semester taking classes at the Graduate School of Theology in Berkeley, California.

At the end of the second sabbatical Sister Miriam retired from Saint Mary's College in 1996 at age 71. She was a recipient of its prestigious Spes Unica Award in 1975. Forty-four years later her impact as an educator still endured to honor her 32 years of dedication to students in mathematics. Saint Mary's College established in 2019 an endowed grant in her name for undergraduate student research in mathematics. Karen "Kae" Bichimer Sobczyk was a math major who was inspired by Sister Miriam's passion for the beauty and application of mathematics and the confidence she had in her students. "Her example of a strong woman, leading with confidence and the love of Jesus, positively influenced me during college and into my professional life," said Kae. She and husband Michael were donors of the endowment.

And how did Sister Miriam spend her retirement years? She moved to Oakland, California where she taught at Holy Names College through 2003. During that time, she also ministered at a retreat center until it closed but continued the same ministry with a colleague, Sister Irene Woodward, CFC, in nearby Castro Valley until retiring to Saint Mary's Convent in 2010, devoted to a ministry of prayer.

During the third week of Advent her years of prayer, community life, and ministry came to fulfillment with her joyful entrance into the kingdom of God. She had persevered as a confident woman serving others and gifted by God.

--Written by Sister Grace Shonk, CSC and Sister Catherine Osimo, CSC