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DIVINE INSPIRATION



Sister Frances Danz set an unforgettable example as president of the San Diego College for Women and, later, as a USD trustee. While the university mourns her March passing, family, alumni and friends remember a woman who led with a caring nature, deep spirituality and keen intellect.

hen Sister Frances Danz received an honorary doctorate of humane letters at USD's 1979 commencement ceremony, she reflected on the university's growth, and glowed with joy and pride.

"I am so happy to see this university blossom," she told the graduates. "No one will ever know how exciting this is for me."

At that time, as always, Sister Danz — who died March 8 after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease — celebrated the success of the university to which she dedicated much of her life, while modestly discounting her own contributions.

But the role she played at USD will never be forgotten. During her seven-year tenure as president of the San Diego College for Women (1956-63), Sister Danz established master's degree programs in English, history and education, secured authorization for USD to grant the California state secondary teaching credential, and began a program to train caregivers to work with the developmentally disabled. Student government flourished under Sister Danz, and a faculty lecture series drew students as well as residents from the surrounding community to the growing campus.

"Sister Danz was a woman of deep spirituality who articulated her prayer with naturalness and simplicity," says USD Academic Vice President and Provost Sister Sally Furay. "She was very wise about people, very witty and a lot of fun."

Those sentiments are echoed by many who knew Sister Danz during her years at USD. As a teacher, administrator, friend, mentor and dedicated member of the Religious Society of the Sacred Heart, Sister Danz always made time for others and left a lasting impression with everyone she encountered.

Ralph Fear '63 is one student who remembers Sister Danz as a person students could turn to for help, even for the little things. He fondly recalls the time she procured a piano for a fraternity party he had planned. "I didn't think I was going to be able to locate one, and I decided to ask Sister Danz," he explains. "She simply said, 'follow me,' and I had a piano for the party that weekend."

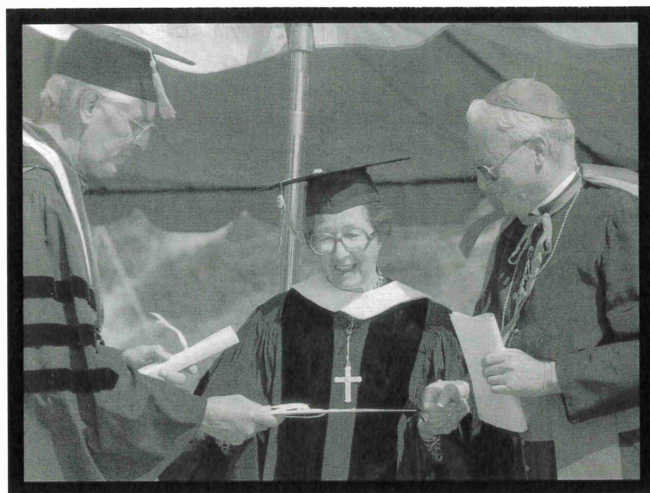
Chemistry was the catalyst for Sister Danz's friendship with another young man, Ken Miller, who recalls meeting her one night when he went to visit his future wife, Jean.

"We began talking about the medical profession and Sister Danz was absolutely thrilled that I knew what she was talking about when she told me the topic of her doctoral dissertation — stereoisomerism," laughs Miller, who was preparing for medical school entrance exams at the time. "I always stopped to chat with her and enjoyed our shared interest after that."

Sister Danz's caring extended to faculty members as well. Former philosophy professor Joseph Ghougassian remembers how warmly she received him when he joined USD in 1966.

"I was a newly arrived teacher from Lebanon at the time, and she made me feel so welcome," he remembers. Later, Ghougassian adds, Sister Danz made sure she attended the baptism of his oldest child, Jasmin.

These scenes from Sister Danz's life come as no surprise to her family members, who say her caring nature was evident even as a child. Born the third of eight children in Seattle on



USD President Author E. Hughes and Bishop Leo T. Maher awarded Sister Danz an honorary doctorate in 1979.

Oct. 29, 1910, Sister Danz soon became a surrogate mother to her younger sister, Aurelia James.

"I was a year old and Frances was 8 when our mother died in the flu outbreak of 1918," James recalls. "She was like an angel to me. She had a brilliant mind and I think the good Lord guided and helped her in all she achieved."

Perhaps that early experience was what led Sister Danz to first pursue a career in nursing. She earned a registered nurse degree from the Providence School of Nursing at the University of Washington. After working as a nurse for six years, she entered the Religious Society of the Sacred Heart in 1941.

Another of her sisters, Helen Case, says that also was a natural choice for Sister Danz. "Frances always had a religious bent," Case recalls. "She was a self-sacrificing person, very interested in other people."

During her years as a young Religious, Sister Danz earned a doctorate in medical microbiology at Stanford University. In 1952, three years after making her profession in Rome as a Religious of the Sacred Heart, she arrived at the newly opened San Diego College for Women to teach microbiology. She was named the second president of the college in 1956.

One of her colleagues was Rev. Monsignor I. Brent Eagen, USD's vice president for mission and ministry. At the time, Monsignor Eagen was an English professor at the San Diego College for Men. He vividly recalls that Sister Danz was always smiling.

"I could always detect her nursing background in her humaneness and understanding of life," Eagen reminisces fondly.

Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco, who knew Sister Danz well during this period, concurs with Monsignor Eagen. He describes her as "a woman of uncommon ability and high competence. At the same time," he remembers, "she had the most endearing personality — pleasant, welcoming, a completely unaffected charm."

In 1963, Sister Danz left Alcalá Park to become superior of the Sacred Heart Schools in Menlo Park, Calif. She returned to San Diego in 1967 to serve as superior of the College for Women, a post that involved her closely with the merger of the College for Women and College for Men into the University of San Diego. She later was named a trustee of the new university.

In 1970, Sister Danz was asked to help establish the Oakwood Health Care Center for the Religious of the Sacred Heart, a national retirement center in northern California for elderly Sacred Heart nuns. She went on to serve as the director of the center when it opened in 1971, and regularly returned to San Diego for meetings of USD's board of trustees. Sister Danz spent her final years at the center.

Sister Helen Donohoe, the superior at Oakwood during Sister Danz's years as director, remembers her with fondness. "We worked as a team," Sister Donohoe recalls. "Frances was brilliant. She was gentle, kind and compassionate toward everyone regardless of their status in the community. She loved parties and was a good sport."

"Frances was very scriptural in her spirituality," Sister Donohoe adds. "She loved the story of Abraham, the man of faith, and she was very faithful in her spiritual commitment throughout her life."

At a memorial Mass for Sister Danz held at USD in March, Archbishop Quinn praised her as an "unusual woman with unusual gifts embroidered into a life of great personal integrity. She was completely absorbed in the depths of her being in the humility and splendor of the Heart of Christ," he added. "This union of love in the service of life imparted to her a clarity of vision and strength of soul that shone through that intelligent face and warm smile. She gave us all many things, the memory of which we now cherish."

Friends at Oakwood plan to honor Sister Danz — who is survived by brother Joseph Danz and sisters Helen Case, Aurelia James and Pauline Alexander — by naming a proposed chapel at the center the Frances Danz Memorial Chapel.

But perhaps the most fitting tribute can be found in Sister Danz's own words.

"Pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on you," Sister Danz once told her students, and then went on to show them how.



Sister Danz arrived at the San Diego College for Women in 1952 and was named president four years later.