News



Adrian Dominican Sr. Maureen Fay (Courtesy of the Adrian Dominican Sisters)



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June 7, 2021

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Adrian Dominican Sr. Maureen Fay (Courtesy of the Adrian Dominican Sisters)

Sr. Maureen ("Marie Timothy") Fay, known for her pioneering roles in Catholic higher education, died May 27, 2021, in her 68th year as an Adrian Dominican. She was 87.

Fay was the president of the University of Detroit Mercy in Michigan from its inception in 1990, when it consolidated the University of Detroit and Mercy College of Detroit, to 2004. In this role, she oversaw the merging of not just administrations and programs, but also of the two charisms of the universities' sponsors.

"She was able to maintain the culture of religious Sisters of Mercy and the culture of the Jesuits when she put together those two schools," Adrian Dominican Sr. Frances Nadolny, who lived in community with Fay for 44 years, told Global Sisters Report.

The successful consolidation, Nadolny said, demonstrated Fay's creativity and expertise in education.

"She kept their traditions, but she also established a whole new institution with its own culture, and that took a great deal of expertise," she said. "She didn't want either culture to dominate the other."

Nadolny said Fay often likened her organizational principle to Noah's Ark: "She had two faculties, two alumni, two staff, two campuses ... to take those and put them together into one was a challenge to her, and one that she did quite well."

The integration created the largest Catholic university in Michigan, with roughly 6,000 students, the Adrian Dominicans said in an obituary for Fay. She received the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, Award in 2007 for her outstanding contributions to Catholic higher education, considered the highest recognition by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. She served as chair of ACCU from 1996 to 1998.

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"In 1990, when Mercy College merged with the University of Detroit to form the University of Detroit Mercy, you became the first non-Jesuit president of any Jesuit college or university in the country," said the citation for her 2009 honorary doctorate by the Jesuit-run College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, according to the Adrian Dominicans.

"It was a historic moment and, appropriately, as a woman of extraordinary courage, vision, energy, and purpose, you embraced this groundbreaking role with wisdom and grace. And your success was great, true and lasting."

Sr. Maureen Fay on the Adrian Dominican Sisters' "Our Dominican Lives: A Sister's Story" series

Fay's experience in higher education — and her groundbreaking roles in leadership — predates her time with the University of Detroit Mercy: When she assumed the

role as president of Mercy College in 1983, Fay was the first in that position who was not a member of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, the Adrian Dominicans said.

Born and raised in Chicago, Fay received a bachelor's degree in English from Siena Heights College in Adrian, Michigan; a master's degree in English from the University of Detroit; and a doctorate in adult and higher education from the University of Chicago. She eventually earned six honorary degrees.

Previously, she served as dean of continuing education and graduate studies at St. Xavier University in Chicago and taught at the University of Illinois, Northern Illinois University, and DePaul University. In addition to serving on the executive committee of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Fay also served on several boards for Catholic universities in the Midwest.

In 1997 and 2002, Crain's Detroit Business recognized Fay as one of Detroit's 100 most powerful women, as her longtime engagement in Detroit's civic life included serving on several boards: Bank One Corporation; Kelly Services Inc.; St. John Health System (now Ascension Michigan); the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation; the Detroit Economic Club; New Detroit Inc.; the Archdiocese of Detroit Endowment Foundation; and the Downtown Detroit Partnership.

In retirement, Fay directed a leadership seminar for the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities.

"There are lots of things about Maureen that we will remember," Nadolny said, noting Fay's active participation in the Adrian Dominican community, her commitment to the city of Detroit, her mentorship, and her sense of humor.

"She had the most wonderful smile."