

Sr. Margaret Carew, 1949 - 2018

In September 1949, a nineteen-year-old Margaret Carew boarded a Texas Eagle at St. Louis, Missouri. Margaret had met her sister there after a long trip from County Tipperary, Ireland, and they were headed to San Antonio, where they would continue studies and preparation to become Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.

While looking for their seats on the train, they passed through a car full of shackled prisoners. Margaret was shocked thinking how these men were going to endure the eighteen-hour trip. That pang of compassion would later take her to dedicate her life ministering and advocating for prisoners.

At first, like many of her fellow Incarnate Word Sisters, Margaret began her work as a nun teaching in elementary schools in Louisiana and in Texas, including one in San Antonio. Years later, she heard that one of her former students had landed in jail, and on the first opportunity she had she visited him. That was the beginning of her new ministry.

Sr. Carew began by volunteering at the Bexar County Jail in her spare time. She did this for ten years before becoming the chaplain, the first woman in that position at the jail. And then she was there for keeps – that is, for the next thirty years.

She was compassionate but tough. One day a seasoned inmate snidely quipped, “And what are you doing here?” “I came to knock the devil out of you,” the five-foot nun retorted.

She was also there to knock the devil out of the prison system, advocating for education classes, counseling and healing through spiritual direction, and more opportunities for religious services. She also promoted more assistance for prisoners’ families. Most of the programs she initiated now have institutional support.

For all her work and her many years behind bars, so to speak, Sr. Margaret Carew became “The Angel of the Bexar County Jail.”