In Memoriam:
Eileen P. Kelly (1955–2013)
Thomas E. Kelly

In the spring of 2011, I was invited by my sister, Dr. Eileen Kelly, Professor of Management at Ithaca College in New York, to co-author a research paper with her. She also invited me to accompany her in presenting our work at the National Conference of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists at Franciscan University of Steubenville in October, 2011. She had been a member of the Society for many years. The paper was to address the issue of Catholic institutions being attacked by federal and state public policies mandating that employer prescription drug plans cover contraceptive drugs, devices, and related services.

To be invited to co-author a paper with my sister was a privilege indeed, not to mention a little intimidating. Our father, Professor Edward J. Kelly, was the Chair of the Accounting and Business Administration Department at Franciscan University of Steubenville. We both majored in accounting and had the good fortune of having our father serve as our professor. On many occasions, generally two or three times a day, he would remind me that Eileen was the greatest student that he ever had. It was an opinion shared by every other professor she had during her college days. She graduated first in her class and rumor was that she never received anything less than perfect grades on all of her quizzes and exams during her undergraduate studies. With the same degree of intensity, Eileen pursued her graduate studies at the University of Cincinnati where she earned her Master’s degree in 1979 and her Ph.D. in 1982 in industrial relations.

Eileen was a disciplined individual who entered the teaching profession in 1982 with a determined and insatiable desire to succeed. Immediately after graduation, she secured a teaching position at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, and quickly gained a reputation for excellent teaching and a strong dedication to research. This reputation only grew as her career led her in 1988 to Louisiana State University in Shreveport, Louisiana, and in 1993 to Ithaca College, where she was promoted to the rank of professor in 1999. Eileen received tenure at all three institutions, an impressive accomplishment experienced by very few academicians.

Our father told us many times that in order for teachers to be successful they must provide both instruction and inspiration to their students. Eileen dedicated her career to fulfilling my father’s philosophy of education. Although she developed a love for academic research, my sister informed
me many times that she believed her primary purpose—the reason that God put her on the earth—was to effectively instruct and inspire her students. She believed that teaching was the art of helping people so that they would succeed personally and professionally while they also were here on the earth. The years and years of excellent teaching evaluations that she received and the gratefulness that continues to be expressed by those who had the good fortune of having Dr. Kelly for class is proof positive that her primary purpose was accomplished.

Dr. Kelly possessed a love for the art of academic research throughout her career and became noted for her scholarly work and publications concerning employment rights, employee workplace rights, privacy rights, labor, management history, and business ethics. Over the last few years, my sister began to turn her research toward social issues confronting the Roman Catholic Church. Eileen was a devout Catholic throughout her life and she clung to the moral teachings of the Magisterium and defended them by means of publication in academic environments where she almost always represented the minority view. Yet this did not deter her. When the federal government began threatening Catholic institutions with the prospect of being forced to offer health insurance plans to their employees that covered services that were diametrically opposed to Church teaching, Eileen decided to fight back in the best way that she knew how. It was during this time that she asked me to join her cause and co-author a paper addressing this attack on the Catholic Church. Fortunately, I agreed and enjoyed one of the greatest experiences that I have ever had in my personal and professional life. The article was eventually published in *The Catholic Social Science Review*, volume 17 (2012) and was entitled “A Retrospective on Public Policy Threats to Religious Liberty in the Workplace.”

The relationship that Eileen and I had was indeed special. With our sister Mary, we lost our parents when we were young. Mary was 30 years old, Eileen 25 years old, and I was 20 years old when our father died in 1981. Mary was married with a family and lived in California at the time. Because of our family predicament, Eileen took on the role of a parental figure to me. Because of the high standards that she demanded, she would forcefully inform me if a course of action I was contemplating was not intelligent and would 99 percent of the time be absolutely correct. She, with straightforward honesty, became a close advisor to me in all aspects of my life. Whether she was encouraging me to enter the academic world, to pursue my doctorate degree, or to apply for tenure and promotion, or assisting me in the ups and downs of raising a family with my beautiful wife (Sandra) and two daughters (Maria and Theresa), Eileen was always there. She demanded much but she would, with all the love and support that she
could muster, insist and make sure that you took the right course of action. After discussions with her colleagues and students, I quickly discovered that the relationship that I had with my sister was one that she consistently applied to all those she loved. She wanted you to succeed and she would truthfully and forcefully do whatever it took to help you get there.

In April of 2011, Eileen began the last lecture of her life when she informed her family that she had contracted endometrial cancer and that she was about to endure surgery and chemotherapy sessions in order to address her situation. Mary and I both urged her to pursue these medical avenues but, because she lived alone with her two dogs, there was a question as to how best to care for her. Through the insistence of my wife, I moved to Ithaca and witnessed Eileen’s four-month physical decline in a day-by-day manner. It was an honor and privilege to be with her throughout this ordeal and to be with her on the greatest day of her life, September 2, 2013—the day she went home to be in the arms of our Savior.

To say I miss my sister, Dr. Eileen Kelly, is an understatement. To lose my forceful mentor, dear friend, and loving sister has been extremely painful for me. Despite this, I can still hear her voice and feel her sense of acceptance regarding the direction that God had given to her. Because of her faith, my faith has increased and I now know that Eileen will always be there, praying, prodding, and inspiring my family, helping us so that we will always choose the road that will lead us closer to Our Lord so that we can all be with her in Paradise.