



Remembering

Mary Gratia De Francesco, CSJ

January 9, 1922 ~ May 17, 2018

Marie Anne DeFrancesco had strong Italian roots; her father, Joseph, was born in Messerecole, Italy. Her mother, Gertrude Anne Iveney was born to an English family in Maine. Italian was spoken in the family home. Marie Anne was the oldest of the children, then came Michael, followed by Dorothy, and Nancy. Marea Anne was born in New Haven, Connecticut, and the family subsequently moved to Binghamton, New York. There she was educated in the public school system. The schools she attended had strong patriotic names: Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, Christopher Columbus Grammar, and Woodrow Wilson Grade School. She attended St. Paul High School and there first met the Sisters of St. Joseph.

As a three year old she had visited her aunt, a Sister of Mercy, and decided to become a Sister. When she was seven, her mother taught her how to knit, crochet and embroider. And when she turned ten she learned

how to run a sewing machine and to cook. As an adult she said she still enjoyed these activities and they relaxed her.

Marie Anne followed her early childhood dream to become a sister, but surprisingly not as a Mercy. Rather, she entered the CSJ Community in 1939 in the New York Province. With respect to her vocation, Sister once wrote, "At the end of my Junior year, Sister Catherine Frances, the principal, asked me when I was going to enter the convent. I told her after graduation next year. 'Why not go this year, you only need two regent subjects to graduate, and you can get them in the Postulate, start your college work - get your regent's diploma in January and receive the habit in March.' I really surprised my mother that afternoon in August, 1939! But she and my Dad gave me their permission and blessing. I had two weeks to get ready but we made it. On September 15, 1939 at 6:00 o'clock in the morning we left for Troy,

New York."

She received the habit on March 19, 1940 at the old seminary in Troy, New York, and also pronounced her first vows there on March 19, 1942. She further wrote, "After first vows in 1942, seventeen of us stayed in the Novitiate to help with the charges around the House as there were only eight first year novices to do all the work. Five of my reception were needed on the missions. In September 1942 I started teaching at St. Lucy School in Syracuse, New York. In 1943 my father was told he would have to move to a warm climate if he hoped to go on living." So her family moved to Long Beach, California.

In 1953, ten years later, Sister was granted permission to transfer to the Los Angeles Province and began teaching at St. Vincent School in Los Angeles.

Sister taught for a total of 36 years, 11 of those years in the Albany Province. The majority of Sister's ministry was in grade school education. In California, Sister taught at St. Vincent School (Los Angeles), St. Patrick (San Diego), St. John's (Hyde Park), Queen of All Saints (Concord), St. Catherine (Martinez), and St. Catherine (Reseda). She was considered an excellent teacher and greatly enjoyed her years in the classroom. She looked forward to correspondence or visits from former students who stayed in touch with her.

In 1984 she was missioned to the Mount to work in the Office of Institutional Research for four years. When her mother became ill, she traveled to Portland, Oregon and became a caregiver for several years, while serving as a part time dietary aide at Mt. St. Joseph's Residence.

Sister returned to Carondelet Center in 1992 to help as a clerical assistant in the Finance Office, later serving in the archives, mailroom, and sacristy. The story is told of how devoted she was to her duties as sacristian. When she took a rare day off, the substitute was told by Father Bill, with a smile, "You are doing alright, but you are no Gratia." Her attention to details was legendary. Sister was notable for her trusting surrender and loving service.

Sister celebrated her 75th Jubilee as a Sister of St. Joseph in 2015. From 1992 - 2017 Sister was a member of St. Mary's Community at Carondelet Center. On June 16, 2017 Sister became a member of the Holy Family Community when her health began to fail.

Sister Gratia showed us in her life and relationships the description of a Sister of St. Joseph: A Sister of St. Joseph is gentle, patient, humble, hardworking, charitable, obedient, but above all Simple and Joyous. Thank you Sister, for all you have taught us by your gentle, generous example, and your willingness to serve the dear neighbor in such diverse roles. ✠

~ Written by Sister Francis Baker, CSJ



*A Sister of St. Joseph is
gentle, patient, humble,
hardworking, obedient
but above all
SIMPLE and JOYOUS.*