Joseph Bernard Russell and Adelaide Josephine Garrel were born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, where they eventually met, married, and settled in their home town. After the sorrow of losing two girls, their son, Joseph, became the first of their family to live as a typical Southern salesman. He and Adelaide thought they would continue to live as a typical Southern family. However in 1928, Joseph received a transfer to the new position at Carondelet High School, Concord, fit her perfectly. Then S. Mary Brigid McLaughlin offered her a similar position in Los Angeles. She accepted and was delighted to join not only St. Joan of Arc School and Parish but also to live with other CSJs in the nearby convent.

Joseph was an insurance salesman. He and Adelaide wanted to move to a warmer climate. Another transfer sent the family to Los Angeles, where they found a home in St. Brigid’s Parish with an elementary school staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph. Katherine was placed in the morning kindergarten; her sister, Thelma, in the all-day first grade, where Katherine spent her afternoons until brother Joe arrived to walk his sisters home. At the end of the year, she had learned all first grade lessons and was promoted to second grade with her sister. From St. Brigid’s she attended Catholic Gills High School graduating in 1939. It was a surprise when her sister, Thelma, left high school in the middle of her senior year and entered the Sisters of St. Joseph. Katherine also was drawn to the Sisters’ way of life. In February 1940, she too entered the postulate at St. Basil’s, a grateful parish again thanked the Sisters of St. Joseph for their 44 years of dedication. The words in the bulletin read: “We say farewell not only to Sister Ellen and Sister Beverly, but to all the Sisters of St. Joseph and an era that has shaped the existence of Catholic schools, leading us to a new era where we must continue their good work, the work of God.”

During 1993-94, she spent her sabbatical at ROCKHAVEN in St. Louis. She returned refreshed and decided she still wanted to be in a school atmosphere. The office position at Carondelet High School, Concord, fit her perfectly. Then S. Regina McLaughlin offered her a similar position in Los Angeles. She accepted and was delighted to join not only St. Joan of Arc School and Parish but also to live with other CSJs in the nearby convent.

When S. Mary Brigid Fitzpatrick, with whom she and S. Regina had entered, also arrived, along with S. Patricia Arnold, they became the “golden oldies” in the house. As the younger sisters left to accept other ministries, Sisters Regina, Mary Brigid, Patricia and Ellen remained until Ellen’s health persuaded her to join Holy Family Community at Carondelet Center. Not long after, it was she who welcomed the other three to Holy Family.

When Ellen arrived to walk his sisters home. In early July, she was hospitalized and diagnosed with cancer. With surgery not an option she accepted the situation with her usual grace and resignation. Even in her rapid decline she smiled her gratitude to her caregivers, family and friends who visited. On July 24th she died peacefully and quietly as she had lived.

In the Book of Proverbs a question is asked. “Who shall find a valiant woman?” Quoting some of the words that follow may remind us of Ellen… “When she opens her mouth, she does so wisely and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” May we learn from this gift you have left us, Ellen. Now go… “receive the reward of your labors”…everlasting happiness in the arms of a loving God.

~ Written by Sister Barbara Dugan, CSJ