



Sister Donna Shanahan, CSJ  
Sister Francis Bernadette Shanahan  
January 24, 1938 - May 2, 2022

Probably the first image of Sister Donna that comes to mind is of her slender, graceful frame moving with purpose and determination, her face reflecting a joyful and receptive expression. Donna was a person who lived with purpose and passion, quietly seeking spiritual renewal and growth then offering the gifts that were hers alone to give.

Born in Chicago, she was the fourth daughter of Frank Bartholomew Shanahan and Florence Julia Teeling. Together the four girls, Elaine, Darlene (Sister Patricia Rose), Phyllis, and Donna Marie performed as a tap dance group in Chicago for several years. There was a special bond among the sisters, and a deepening love among them over the years.

Donna experienced a happy childhood and grew into a responsible and caring adult. After her graduation from Wentworth Elementary School, the family moved to California. In 1956 she graduated from John Burrough's High School in Burbank.

Before entering the Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Donna was employed at the Los Angeles Times and with her sibling, Sister Patricia Rose, attended daily mass at St. Vibianna Cathedral in downtown Los Angeles. It was here the pastor, Msgr. Robert Stein, introduced them to the CSJ community.

Donna entered religious life on September 15, 1958. She received the habit on March 19, 1959 and was given the religious name Sister Francis Bernadette, which she kept until 1967. She pronounced first vows on March 19, 1961. In 2009, Donna gratefully celebrated

her 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee and was the Jubilee speaker, noting that the years go by quickly. Donna said, "I am so grateful for God's love and for allowing me to serve." Her legacy of love began in her family and runs through her years of ministry.

Sister Donna brought a rich background to her ministry. In 1963 she graduated from the Mount as an Art Major, received her teaching credential in 1966, and some years later received training in spiritual direction at the Doheny Campus. For eighteen years she taught as an elementary teacher in Southern and Northern California. Sister served for nine years in parish ministry and on the staff at the House of Prayer in La Habra. She ministered in retreat work, spiritual direction, and as an artist. Over the years Donna attended Sisters' Council meetings, and was invited to also attend the Priests' Council meetings to offer input. She served on the CSJ Arts Committee and other committees.

From 2007 Donna was a spiritual companion at St. Anthony Retreat Center in Three Rivers and at her parish in Bakersfield. Donna noticed the everyday beauty and sacredness of things. She described Three Rivers, "It is beautiful. There is a variety of wildlife, deer, bears, snakes, and wild turkeys. It is at the 1,200 foot elevation, so there are four seasons. Fall is magnificent." On days off, she enjoyed acrylic painting. "It is part of my ministry. I like to paint land and oceanscapes. I become immersed in the process and lose myself in the process."

Members of her reception recall that Sister Donna was a gifted artist, she was compassionate and joy-filled, fun loving. They remarked on her sense of humor, contagious laughter, and noted a contemplative dimension to her life. Other members of her reception remember her as generous in sharing her time and talent. They recalled she was always pleasant, positive, interested in others. She enjoyed people. Those who knew her over the years found her to be an attentive listener, one who could make you feel special.

She enjoyed travel adventures with her sister, Sister Patricia Rose. Over the years Donna traveled to Europe, England, France, Hawaii, and spent two weeks in Guatemala.

No doubt suffering made her a patient listener and a compassionate companion, offering understanding to those who sought spiritual direction. Donna had a hidden intensity yet retained a cheerful hope for the future. At this time we might imagine Donna offering comfort to us for her sudden departure from this life.

Donna, we thank you for your listening heart and ability to discern the movement of the Creative Spirit for yourself and others. May God receive your generous spirit and grant more than you could ever ask for or imagine.

*~ Written by Sister Frances Baker, CSJ*

