



Sister Bernice Pelczar, OSF

Professed 1971

*“Let us keep a place for Christ in our lives, let us care for one another,
and let us be loving custodians of Creation.”*

Pope Francis



Sister Bernice Pelczar cared deeply for others, honoring Christ through the countless lives she served and through her love and knowledge of Creation. Sister Bernice entered the eternal loving embrace of God on December 3, 2021. She had been a professed member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia for 51 years.

Sister Bernice grew up in Philadelphia with her twin sister, Theresa, and older sister, Antoinette. From her earliest years and her schooldays at St. Hubert Catholic High School, Sister Bernice lived the essence of caring and love. She embraced both learned and lived wisdom, which she shared to benefit others, including through her prayer ministry in Assisi House. At Neumann University, she earned a bachelor’s degree in biology and a certificate in pastoral counseling, a depth of knowledge she brought to all her ministries.

A descendant of St. Joseph Sebastian Pelczar (1842-1924), Sister Bernice followed a family tradition of serving others. Like Sister Bernice, Bishop of Przemyśl (Poland) Joseph Sebastian was a classroom teacher and worked tirelessly for the poor, marginal, and oppressed. When Pope John Paul II presided over St. Joseph Sebastian Pelczar’s canonization in 2003, the saint’s loyal relative Sister Bernice was present.

Sister Bernice’s classroom teaching guided elementary and high-school students and those learning English as a second language. Among the Philadelphia-area schools she served were Resurrection of Our Lord, St. Benedict, Little Flower, St. Bonaventure, and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. She also taught in Allentown Catholic High School and later in St. Francis of Assisi School in Gallup, New Mexico. And through the Delaware County Literacy Council and Wilmington’s Literacy Volunteers Serving Adults, she helped adults to advance their communication skills.

Reflecting on her ministries and five decades as a sister of St. Francis, Sister Bernice wrote, “There is no greater gift that God has given to me than my Franciscan vocation. I am ever grateful for the opportunity to work among God’s poor and to experience community. I have lived with many wonderful sisters and thank God for their friendship and support.” Throughout her life, Sister Bernice showed her unstinting love and caring for her family and heritage and for her friends and neighbors near and far.

In addition to her teaching, Sister Bernice lived her devotion to others in part through her social service ministries. As Sister Marijane Hresko explains, Sister Bernice “did not just serve the poor; she identified and engaged with them. She was *with* them.” Sister Bernice ministered as a caseworker with the Delaware County Department of Human Services, with Project Rainbow serving women and children experiencing homelessness, and with the Ministry of Caring, in Wilmington, Delaware. She ministered to the poor and homeless in Philadelphia’s St. Francis Inn, and her social work ministry with Casa del Carmen took her to Puerto Rico. In Wilmington, she gave of her knowledge and experience through volunteer work with the St. Francis Hospital communications department and with Sojourners’ Place, Catholic Charities’ Bayard House, and the House of Joseph.

As Sister Ann David Strohming shares, Sister Bernice was a “joyful, happy person” whose gifts included creativity and a sense of fun. Sister Ann adds, “She loved Advent and Christmas and the joy of St. Francis.” Sister Bernice’s broad interests and Franciscan spirit were reflected in her pastimes. She loved swimming, reading, needlepoint, cooking, and “taking care of caregivers.” She felt special pleasure while cats Mittens and TC were a part of her home, and in recent years, she volunteered with the Delaware Humane Society, helping to find loving homes for cats.

St. Joseph Sebastian Pelczar expressed a fervent wish: “O God, would that I could give You every moment of my life!” Sister Bernice Pelczar lived that vision. She served God and God’s Creation through her love and through her gifts—given to all who knew her and all those whose lives she has touched.

*Services will be held at Assisi House on Thursday, December 9. The viewing will be held at 9:30 A.M.
Mass of Christian Burial will follow at 11 A.M., with burial in Our Lady of Angels Cemetery.*

