



Sister Mary Ellen Farley, OSF *Professed 1961*

Be very joyful and glad! Be filled with a remarkable happiness and a spiritual joy!
St. Clare of Assisi



Sister Mary Ellen Farley (formerly Sister Michael Bernadette) entered the eternal loving embrace of God on January 15, 2022, in Seattle, Washington. She had been a professed member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia for 61 years. Sister Mary Ellen was born in San Francisco and grew up in Tacoma, Washington, with her five siblings. She graduated from Tacoma's St. Leo High School and, prior to entering the Sisters of St. Francis congregation in Portland, Oregon, was a member of Tacoma's St. John of the Woods Parish.

During her long and dedicated ministry, Sister Mary Ellen served primarily in elementary education and in spiritual education and direction. The many elementary school children to know the blessing of her knowledge, enthusiasm, and encouragement were those in the primary grades of St. Thomas School, Riverside, California; St. Charles School, Tacoma, Washington; and St. Charles School,

Spokane, Washington. As a coach for several elementary and high-school baseball and basketball teams, Sister Mary Ellen also brought her enthusiasm and talents to teaching outside the classroom.

In her spiritual ministry, Sister Mary Ellen served for nearly two decades in Portland, Oregon, as a retreat director, educator for adults, outreach specialist, therapist, and spiritual director. Her ministry during this time included, for example, serving as the first director of Portland's Franciscan Renewal Center. For 14 years, Sister Mary Ellen ministered at St. Anne's Children's Home in Spokane, Washington, where she served as a housemother and also as director. In 1973, her leadership was instrumental in safely evacuating all of the St. Anne's residents—including 15 infants—during a serious fire. Among the numerous other settings blessed by her ministry were the Franciscan Spiritual Center in Milwaukie, Oregon, and St. Ann Convent in Tacoma, Washington, where her contributions included serving in prayer ministry, as interim coordinator, and even as a driver for the convent. In 2018, she moved to St. Joseph Residence, Seattle, where she lived and served in prayer ministry until her death.

Sister Mary Ellen radiated optimism and gratitude for life, and others loved being in her presence. Sister Emma Holdener recalls, "She was very loving and always interested in the person she was talking with or giving spiritual direction." She was kind, helpful, and family oriented, relishing gatherings with her sisters in community and her family. A great sports fan, she loved cheering on the Seattle Seahawks with her own equally enthusiastic sisters. Her wonderful laugh reflected her engaging sense of humor. As Sister Emma shares, "She loved a joke, or would burst into song at any moment. It was wonderful to be associated with her for so many years."

Equally engaging was Sister Mary Ellen's ability to find the positive even in some difficult situations. Her golden jubilee included an excellent example of this gift. Although she celebrated her jubilee on the West Coast with family and friends, Sister Mary Ellen also came east prepared to celebrate with friends at the congregational jubilee. Due to illness, however, she was hospitalized not far from the motherhouse. But Sister Mary Ellen took this disappointment in stride, writing jubilee reflections that included a beautiful thank-you to the sisters who had come to visit her in the hospital.

In his poem "A Blessing: For Equilibrium," John O'Donohue includes lines that could describe Sister Mary Ellen Farley: "Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore, / May the relief of laughter rinse through your soul." Sister Mary Ellen generously shared her wonderfully encouraging outlook, her sense of humor, and the warmth of her smile and spirit with her sisters in community and with all those with whom she ministered. She truly gifted the world with a generous measure of happiness and spiritual joy.

*All services will be held at St. Leo Church, 710 S 13th St, Tacoma, Washington,
on Friday, January 28, 2022, at 12 P.M. (Noon).*

