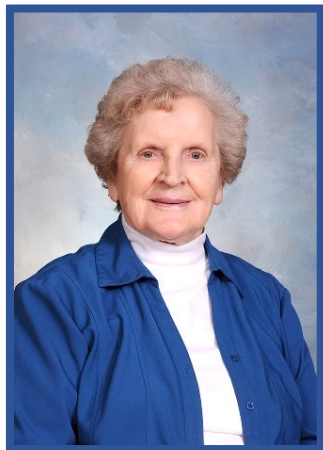




## *Sister Stella Mary Breen, OSF*

### *Professed 1952*

*We must live the faith, not only with our words, but with our actions. —Pope Francis*



After a lifetime of living her faith through serving others, Sister Stella Mary Breen died in Assisi House, Aston, Pennsylvania, on March 26, 2022. Sister Stella Mary was born Julia Mary Breen in the village of Kiskeam, County Cork, Ireland. Inspired by cousins who were sisters of St. Francis, she—along with her late sister, Sister Mary Breen—entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in 1949 in Mallow, County Cork, Ireland. She professed her first vows in Our Lady of Angels Chapel, Aston, in 1952.

Throughout her seven decades with the congregation, Sister Stella Mary ministered in elementary education and parish service with unfailing devotion, wisdom, and kindness. She earned her Bachelor of Science in English, with a minor in French, from Mount St. Mary's University. Beginning in 1951 and continuing until the mid-1980s, her ministry focused on teaching. She served in classrooms—spanning first through eighth grade—in Wilmington, Delaware; Baltimore County, Maryland; North Augusta, South Carolina; Pensacola, Florida; and Jacksonville, North Carolina.

In 1985, Sister Stella Mary became the liturgy coordinator for Our Lady of the Springs Church in Ocala, Florida, where she also ministered to the sick. Then for 26 years she ministered with Sister Sheila Byrne at the Franciscan Center on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, where she served the island's migrant residents and Gullah people, who are descendants of slaves. Sisters Stella Mary and Sheila quickly recognized great need on the island, including immigration challenges the sisters would assist their new neighbors in overcoming. They came to know and serve the migrant families and helped organize a Mass in Spanish that eventually attracted a congregation of nearly one hundred. For both the migrant and the Gullah communities, the sisters provided financial and housing assistance, created a food pantry and a small store offering affordable clothes and school supplies, aided residents in finding better employment, and—with the help of the Franciscan Center's many volunteers—provided daily tutoring for about 70 children and adults.

Speaking of her friend of more than 50 years, Sister Sheila Byrne said, "We lost a beautiful lady. She walked humbly with God, lived simply, and acted always with integrity." Sister Margaret Xavier Romans spoke of Sister Stella Mary's delightful dry sense of humor and her awareness of each person's needs: "She never turned a person away; she was always there with them." Among the many St. Helena Island residents to express their gratitude, one woman said, "Sisters Stella Mary and Sheila have taught me English, helped me and my husband get citizenship, helped us to get a house, and worked with our three boys with their schoolwork. When I need help, I can always call them." For their ministry assisting immigrants in becoming U.S. citizens, Sister Stella Mary and Sister Sheila were awarded the DAR Americanism Medal. Among Sister Stella Mary's other honors for her widely recognized service are the Hispanic Heritage Award, Maternal and Child Health Award, Beaufort Humanitarian Award, and University of South Carolina Beaufort's Award for Distinguished Service to the Lowcountry.

For the past nine years, Sister Stella Mary served in prayer ministry at Assisi House, where she also enjoyed sewing, knitting, reading, and puzzles. Looking back over her life and sharing some of her greatest satisfactions, she included "being a sister of St. Francis and receiving the love and respect that go with that title; getting the opportunity to work with young people, the very poor, and the immigrant; and having a joyful life knowing you were doing God's will in being obedient to mission." She shared that she wanted to be remembered as "gentle and kind; loving God and seeking to do His will; prudent, wise, and honest; and a good teacher bringing out the best in students." Living her Franciscan faith and charisma through her actions—her ministry and service—she was all of these: an immeasurable blessing to her family and friends, congregation, students, and all whose lives she touched.

*All services will be held at Assisi House on Thursday, March 31, 2022.*

*Viewing will begin at 9:30 A.M., followed by Mass of Christian Burial at 11 A.M. These services will be livestreamed.*

*Burial will be in Our Lady of Angels Cemetery.*

