

Sister St. Joseph Brennon, OSF

Professed 1951

"Artists are the custodians of beauty, heralds and witnesses of hope for humanity." Pope Francis



Sister St. Joseph Brennon gave beauty and hope through her art and the Franciscan charism shining from her. She once wrote that she “tried to be a good Franciscan,” and her life gave testament to fulfilling that desire. Sister St. Joseph passed away at her home in Assisi House on October 8, 2022, after 71 years as a professed sister of St. Francis.

Sister St. Joseph was born Elizabeth Joan Brennon near Boston, Massachusetts. She and her parents—Frederick and Gertrude—and her six siblings were members of Quincy’s Holy Trinity Parish. After graduating from Quincy Public High School, Sister St. Joseph entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, professing her first vows in 1951. Pursuing her artistic interests and talents, she earned a Bachelor of Science in art education from The Catholic University of America and a Master of Arts in art education from Towson State University. Using her many gifts, she ministered in education, healthcare, and social services.

In the early 1950s, beginning her ministry in healthcare, Sister St. Joseph was a nursing student at St. Joseph Hospital in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Following her training, she served as a nurse at St. Mary Hospital in Philadelphia and as a nursing supervisor at St. Francis Hospital in Trenton, New Jersey. As part of her healthcare ministry, she felt a special calling to be with those who were dying, to comfort and pray with them at that holy time.

Combining her skills in nursing and art, she served as a school nurse and art teacher for The Catholic High School of Baltimore for 13 years. Then for a decade beginning in 1977, Sister St. Joseph returned to her home diocese, the Archdiocese of Boston, where she was an art teacher and volunteer at Blessed Sacrament School and Parish in Walpole and ministered in social services at St. Francis House/Boyleston Center in New Bedford.

Sister St. Joseph’s ministries in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia spanned more than two decades. Sister Louise Quinn was an art-appreciation student in one of the many classes Sister St. Joseph taught at Neumann University. Sister Louise speaks of the Franciscan quality of Sister St. Joseph’s artistic seeing: “When she saw something such as a daisy, she would gravitate to it and express its beauty. She was able to capture the beauty of creation and communicate it to others.” Sister St. Joseph was similarly dedicated to the poor and served in social service work at the Bethesda Project in Philadelphia, St. Mary’s Franciscan Shelter in Phoenixville, and Bethel Shelter and Anna’s Place, both in Chester. She volunteered for her congregation at Assisi House, at the Franciscan Spiritual Center, and in local house ministry. Between ministries in the Philadelphia archdiocese, Sister St. Joseph served for two years as the campus minister for Chaminade University of Honolulu, Hawaii. From 2015 until her death, she ministered in prayer and hospitality at Assisi House.

Art was a part of Sister St. Joseph’s social service ministries as well as her teaching. She encouraged and added beauty to countless lives—from schoolchildren to people who are homeless—by her own artistry and by bringing out others’ creativity. Some told her that through art she had changed their lives. A needlework picture of St. Francis sewn by a man who was homeless and was inspired in his art by Sister St. Joseph hung in her room. Working in her “studio” in a converted janitorial closet, she created crafts for the annual Sisters of St. Francis craft fair and encouraged other sisters to help with the projects. She also taught art classes for the Assisi House sisters. In addition to the beautiful works of art and crafts she created, she loved being out in nature and enjoyed fishing and camping.

At the time of her Golden Jubilee, Sister St. Joseph reflected on her life as a sister of St. Francis up to that point: “My response to the last 50 years is one of gratitude—‘fountain full and flowing over.’ God indeed is Love, for who would believe I’d last 50 years? Not I! God’s goodness to me is without end. Sisters, thank you for being *gift* to me.” Asked to reflect on her own gifts, she wrote, “Like St. Joseph, I did the best I could.” Sister St. Joseph Brennon’s best was a profound blessing to all whose lives she touched through her art and through the beauty, kindness, and wisdom of her ways and her spirit.

*All services will be held in Assisi House on Thursday, October 13, and will be livestreamed.
A Christian Wake Service will be held at 9:30 A.M. Mass of Christian Burial will be at 11 A.M.
Burial will be in Our Lady of Angels Cemetery.*