



Sister Joan Dreisbach, OSF

Professed 1950

"More compassionate mind, more sense of concern for other's well-being, is source of happiness." Dalai Lama



Throughout her 73 years as a professed sister of St. Francis, Sister Joan Dreisbach gave deep and joyful witness to God and the Gospel. Her life beautifully realized her desire to be a good Franciscan and to set a good example to all she lived with and to whom she ministered. Sister Joan's many years in healthcare and compassionate service to others proved to be a source of happiness for not only those who knew her but for herself as well.

Sister Joan, who died on January 2, 2023, was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where she lived with her parents, Harry and Kathryn, and her brother and sisters. She was a member of Allentown's St. Francis Parish and was a student at Central Catholic High School. She entered the congregation in 1947 and professed her first vows in 1950. Sister Joan earned her BSN from Villanova University, and then, from St. John's University, earned a Master's in Administration.



Reflecting recently on her life as a sister of St. Francis, Sister Joan wrote, "I was inspired by the Sisters of St. Francis as a child and throughout my schooling and life, I have continued to be inspired by our sisters. I have had a wonderful life from birth to the present and I am thankful to God for all his blessings."

Sister Joan began her life as a sister in education teaching for two years at Resurrection School in Chester and studying for a degree in elementary education when she received notice from the congregation that she was to become a nurse. Initially, she was surprised, but after only six months into the nursing program at St. Joseph Hospital in Philadelphia and St. Francis Hospital in Bryn Mawr, Sister Joan decided, "Nursing was definitely for her." After receiving her nursing degree, Sister Joan served as head nurse and taught obstetrics at St. Mary Hospital, Philadelphia; served in administration at Villa St. John Vianney Hospital, Downingtown; and was coordinator of health services for the congregation—serving as coordinator of our Franciscan Hospitals (12 in the U.S. and one in Ireland); work that Sister Joan described as "positive and challenging."

Sister Joan ministered for 20 years in the Diocese of Harrisburg at St. Joseph Hospital where she taught medical/surgical nursing for a year before becoming president of the hospital. An article published in the *Lancaster News* when she left this position quotes, "From the birthing room in obstetrics, where a home-like atmosphere is encouraged to the special waiting room for families undergoing surgery, Sister Joan has tried to shape the hospital services to include a personal touch. Many in the Lancaster community see the accomplishments during her 8-year tenure in terms of an upgraded nursing program, the new cardiac, audiology, and substance abuse programs, and the hospital's status as an emergency resource center."

In her role as pastoral associate for 17 years in the Trenton diocese at St. Leo the Great Parish in Lincroft, she was well loved for her many gifts. One parishioner wrote of Sister Joan, "She does a wonderful job welcoming each and every family who joins St. Leo's." In 2006 Sister Joan joined with 14 other parishioners to travel to New Orleans to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina. Sister Joan said of the venture, "This added to the experiences of my life," noting that the moving journey forged bonds with the people who lost literally everything to the waters." She was awarded the *Nostrum Ecclesiam Tempus* Award by Bishop John M. Smith in 2007 for her service and for having participated in extraordinary ways in the mission of the Church.

Throughout her life, Sister Joan lived her faith and Franciscan charism with joy, with deep conviction and sincerity, and with an abiding devotion to others. Her friend, Sister Marie Rachfalski, said of Joan, "She had great respect for people. While Administrator of St. Joseph Hospital, Joan would walk through every corridor of every floor of the hospital each day. She greeted all employees by name—the man mopping the floor, the woman emptying trash cans, the aide carrying sheets, the nurse going into a room. If anyone stopped her to talk, Joan gave the speaker her full attention, never shifting her eyes from the person's face. She modeled for me Franciscan humanism. At Assisi House she gave that same respect to all she met." To all who knew her, her life will continue to remain a treasured blessing.



*All services will be held in Assisi House on Thursday, January 12, 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.*