

Sister Mary Franz Celebrates Her 100th Birthday



Sister Mary Franz celebrated a milestone birthday on May 23, 2016. “I didn’t think I would make it this far,” said Sister Mary, “but every morning I thank God for everything and I take it one day at a time.”

Friends, family, residents of Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home and her Joliet Franciscan Sisters gathered for two days of celebrations held in her honor. At one of her surprise parties, relatives and friends came from as far as Ohio, Pennsylvania and Denver to be with her. Two more parties were held on the day of her centennial birthday, where civic and religious dignitaries from around the State of Illinois came to Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home to celebrate with her. Bishop R. Daniel Conlon; Mayor Robert O’Dekirk and State Senator Pat McGuire made special appearances to be with Sr. Mary on her special day.

When asked what the secret to living to 100 is, she will tell you that she embraces every day of life as a glorious gift from God and that each day is a new beginning. Born in Ohio, Sister Mary (formerly known as Sister Ursuline) is now a resident at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home in Joliet where she offers a “ministry of presence” to other residents by visiting, talking and praying with them.

Sister Mary was a teacher for many years in elementary schools, high schools and at the College of St. Francis (now the University of St. Francis). She also served as Director of Postulants for the Congregation from 1960-1967. Ms. Sheila Torres, a former postulant, shared this remembrance. “Sister Mary was always so loving to all of us, like another mother. When she hugged you, you felt her warm and sincere embrace. She was firm when she needed to be to teach us about our responsibilities as members of the Congregation, but we knew she loved us and cared for us. I remember being thoroughly impressed with her skills in playing volleyball; she could definitely out play us! The one thing I took with me from my days at St. Francis was the Franciscan joy in all of the Sisters of the community, and that started with Sister Mary’s ever-present smile and joy in her own vocation and instilling that joy in her postulants.”

Sister Mary also enjoys telling stories of her own life. Recently, she shared a time when she was driving four other Sisters of the Congregation. She admits she might have been driving a little too fast and was pulled over by a policeman. Needless to say, her companions were a little nervous. Instead of a ticket, the policeman gave Sister Mary this piece of advice. “Sister, say a prayer and slow down!”

In 2011 at age 95, Sister Mary was asked to participate in a panel discussion regarding vocations. Although she was unable to do so at that time, she sent a letter which covered different chapters of her religious life. Sister Mary closed her letter with these words. “Even though I am in my mid-nineties and have retired from active duties, I can still - in the spirit of St. Francis - serve and minister to those around me. That part of me continues as long as our good and faithful God gifts me to be for those in need! I try to live in the present NOW. Like in all walks of life, there are good days and there are not such good days, but for the gift of each new morning there comes the gift of the new day- a new beginning. So each day we can start all over again. Isn’t God good, compassionate and merciful?!”



Bishop Conlon congratulates Sister Mary Franz on her birthday.