

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER LAVERNE CASSIDY

August 29, 1930—November 19, 2017



My friendship with Sister Laverne began when we drove to Dover, Massachusetts, for a sabbatical leave in January 1999 and were “iced in” for three days at a motel in Scranton. There we discovered our mutual love of playing cards and cheering for the Steelers. It is my privilege to share these reflections with you.

Who is the Sister Laverne I know? I imagine her life as a mosaic that reveals her intimate loving relationship with God in the lived reality of humility, simplicity, charity, and remembering that God is ever present. Or as Sister Laverne wrote, and I quote, “The simple look of the heart to God draws and unites it to Him in a sentiment of peace and confidence, the fruit of His goodness to those who love Him.”

Mother Seton provides us a glimpse of this relationship:

“Keep well to the grace of the moment . . . do your best and leave the rest to God.”

One facet of this mosaic that is Laverne’s life is *her attentiveness to God’s urgings in her heart*. In her oral history, she reveals her longing for “the more” — even as a young woman working at Westinghouse. She and her friends made retreats where she acknowledges, “We had a great time—not necessarily much praying—but a good time!” A chance article in the paper led her to Seton Hill for a retreat. She knew no one—had never been there. In fact, she was surprised at the number of buildings on campus. There she met Joanie Petrarca, a student who was also making the retreat. Their friendship led to other visits to Seton Hill, and eventually her entrance on September 8, 1954. She was a member of the Marian Year group. During her visits, Laverne loved the chapel and felt that it “spoke to her heart.”

In his letter of recommendation, her pastor, Father Flaherty states, “We all like her at Saint William for what she is and her friendly, reserved manner. We hope that the years ahead will bring to realization, under God’s grace, a sister who will serve

her God and her community with joy and honor.” That hope has certainly been fulfilled!

Another facet of this mosaic is her willingness to serve wherever and however God led her:

- Adjusting to being seven years older than the sisters with whom she entered;
- Teaching primary grades;
- Going back to school to get her academic degree;
- Moving from second grade to high school where she taught business courses and religion;
- Being elected to council;
- Serving as treasurer of the community.

In all of these situations, she felt the support of the sisters with whom she lived and worked. Over and over, she stated “we had fun”.

Her loving compassion is a primary part of this mosaic and reveals the love she shared with her family. In 1961, her sister Bernice died very suddenly at work. Laverne was sent to Saint Anselm so that she would be close to her mom and be able to help out at home, eventually staying at home to care for her mother while commuting to Greensburg as she served on the council. In due course, her mother was able to move to Saint Anne Home, Greensburg, where Laverne visited her daily.

The admonition from Mother Seton to “Do your best and leave the rest to God,” was challenged during her time at Assumption Hall where she learned to drive. Laverne had difficulty learning to park. So Sister Mary Coleman took her to the parking lot at Greengate Mall early on a Sunday morning where they parked, and parked some more until Laverne mastered the technique.

An important piece of this mosaic was her ***business acumen and ability to think outside the box***. During her second term in office she was instrumental in encouraging the religious communities in the tri-diocesan group of sisters to come together to invest their monies to use for our “aged, infirm, disabled members.” This investment helped these communities so that the profits for each community would be substantial. We still benefit from this initial endeavor.

Then came time for a sabbatical—four and one half months at Saint Stephen in Dover and then out to Arizona to complete the “sabbath year.” While she was there, she learned that the parish needed someone to do pastoral care—and yes, she stayed there (Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Tucson) for two years, and loved this ministry.

When some health issues brought her home to Greensburg, she found “she couldn’t just sit around.” And so began her ministry as a volunteer —at Westmoreland Manor, operating the gift shop and preparing the taxes for it, working to update the files in the Human Resources Department, and making hair appointments for the sisters on Saturday.

Invite Laverne to a game of cards and she’d be there ready to play—and hopefully **win**. Our last real conversation was an invitation for me to join the Thursday night game. As much as the cards, she reveled in the comradery of being together for fun and exchanging quips with those at the game. And a box of candy was always welcome! Besides cards, Laverne was known to enjoy an occasional outing at the casino. We’re told that she locked her purse in the trunk and only took so much money in with her (wise stewardship). **Enjoying life** was definitely a part of who Laverne was—as evidenced often by her gift of laughter!

All of these mission opportunities tell us is that Sister Laverne was a very intelligent, competent sister of charity who gave 110% to everything she ever did. What they don’t tell us is how **appreciative** she was to the sisters who served as her mentors along the way; how deeply she loved and cared for her family and friends, especially her mother; how she served as mentor to those who followed her in her various positions.

What a loving caring friend she was to all!

Laverne sums up her life as a Sister of Charity by reflecting “In all my ministries, I experienced God’s loving and merciful care. I hope that, in some small way, I have made his presence a reality in the lives of those to whom I ministered. May the Charity of Christ continue to urge us.”

Laverne was proud of her Irish heritage and hoped that she had inherited an “Irish wit.” Her ability to tell and enjoy a joke or amusing anecdote shows that she had indeed inherited this “Irish wit.” So in her name, I offer this Irish blessing:

*May joy and peace surround you,
Contentment latch your door,
And happiness be with you now
And bless you ever more!*

Go in peace, Laverne. Bask in your loving union with the God who loves you and has drawn you to himself for all eternity!

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Kathleen McCauley
November 22, 2017*