

Reflection on the Life of Sister Mary Brian McConnell, SC September 17, 1926-December 18, 2018



We are gathered together to remember and to celebrate the life of Sister Mary Brian, our quiet lady. She was blessed with a life well lived.

Sister Mary Brian was a relational woman with several names captured by specific relationships. She was Mary to her brother and her sister. She was Aunt Mary to her nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews. She was Sister Mary or Sister Mary B. to friends. She was Sister Mary Brian to her sisters in community. To me, she was and always will be Mary.

Sister Mary Brian was a woman of prayer a woman of faith and a woman of service.

Her parents were Randall J. McConnell and Helen (affectionately called Nellie) M. Maguire. Her siblings were Randal J. McConnell and Helen McConnell Wittman, who have preceded her in death. Mary was the youngest. She was baptized on October 3, 1926, at Saint Bernard Church, Mt. Lebanon. Sister Mary Brian's baptismal name was Mary Margaret.

Sister Mary B. had a loving and supportive family as evidenced in their recent visits. She had two nieces and two nephews from her brother's family branch. They are Kathy Curry, Randal J. McConnell, Peggy Meadows, and Jim McConnell. She had two nieces and four nephews from her sister's family branch. They are John Wittman, Nancy Sullivan, Eileen Dodge, Mark Wittman, Philip Wittman, and Chris Wittman. Their Aunt Mary had grandnieces, grandnephews, and some great-grandnieces and great-grandnephews.

We are happy today to have with us today one niece, Kathy, two nephews, Randy and Chris, and two grandnieces, Maggie and Megan, to celebrate their

Aunt Mary's life with all of us. Sister Mary B. served as godmother for Randy and Megan as well.

Sister Mary Brian McConnell asked for a recommendation to enter the Sisters of Charity from her pastor, Father Joseph L. Lonergan, who wrote "She comes from a good family and since she attended Elizabeth Seton High School for four years, your Sisters certainly know her well enough to judge whether or not she will make a good candidate." After 68 years of faithful service, it is very clear that his words were accurate and true.

Prior to entrance, Mary worked as a stenographer. She entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill on September 8, 1950 with her good friend, Pat Wheeler. Mary would quip that she and Pat were having such a good time; however, they decided to enter before they needed a dispensation. (This is Mary's Irish wit in play.) Their 1950 group was the "Holy Year Group." Sister Mary Brian was the current senior of her group when she went to God on December 18, 2018.

Sister Mary Brian served in three different types of ministry. She was an excellent teacher from 1952 to 1986. She taught at schools in Altoona, Greensburg, Bethesda, and Pittsburgh. She primarily taught at schools in several Pittsburgh neighborhoods. Her longest tenure of 12 years was at Saint Stephen School in Hazelwood.

Sister Mary Brian taught math to students of grades four, five, and six. She commented that her favorite was sixth grade. Sister Mary Brian taught the slower students whom she loved. She remarked that "the brightest students do not need help and that the average would catch on, but the slower students really need help."

After a sabbatical in California, Sister Mary Brian began her second formal ministry at St. Joseph House of Hospitality from 1987 to 2005. She served as a bookkeeper and as an active listener to the poor. She enjoyed listening to the men tell their stories. Sister reconnected with her dear friend, Sister Marcella Mary, as they served together there.

After retiring from St. Joseph House of Hospitality, Sister started a third informal and personal ministry. She helped with the sick and served as a nanny. Maurine Jefferies was stricken with cancer and Sister assisted with Maurine's many needs during her illness until she went to God. Sister Mary Brian was a nanny to Haley from the age of one month to five years of age. Often, she would walk to the park to play on the swings and would watch Haley swim.

Sister Mary Brian summarized her ministries: "Through God's grace and presence, I was able to make a difference in people's lives who have been a part of the tapestry of my life personally and professionally."

On a personal note, I met Sister Mary Brian at Saint Stephen Convent in 1987. God gave us the gift of friendship. Mary was always a faithful, loyal, and honest friend. Mary loved to have fun and we enjoyed many activities together. Some of these activities included visits to Barnes and Noble Book Store to look at magazines and to indulge in a blueberry scone heated with caramel drizzle and a hot cup of coffee.

She enjoyed watching the Steelers and other pro football teams, Notre Dame, and the Pittsburgh Penguins. She enjoyed walking on beaches and boardwalks as well as jumping waves at Stone Harbor at the Jersey Shore. She also loved watching movies, especially the Quiet Man with John Wayne.

As the celebration of her life moves to closure, remember Sister Mary Brian/Sister Mary B./Sister Mary's parting words to family, friends, and sisters in community:

"Love. Be Positive. Be Happy. Forgive."

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Joan Murray
December 22, 2018*