

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER IRENE FALON

August 28, 1928-November 6, 2019



In Irish families, nothing is as important as the wake and funeral Mass. You can miss weddings, baptisms and confirmations, but you are there for the wake and the funeral. We are here to celebrate the life of Irene Fallon who died on Wednesday, November 6, at supper time.

Our great grandfather, Patrick Fallon, was born and lived in Roscommon, a border county in the center of Ireland. He married a widow, Mrs. Lang, who had three children (She was always called Mrs. Lang). She and Patrick Fallon had five more children. Irene's and my grandfather and our Greensburg and State College cousins' great-grandfather were among these five children. Mrs. Lang died and Patrick Fallon, a widower with eight children, married again. He and his second wife had seven or eight children. When she died, Patrick Fallon married for the third time and they had children. In the end, I think that there were 21 or 22 children. Some of the children migrated to the United States; others lived and died in Ireland. Irene is part of a very large extended family.

When Irene was growing up, relatives and friends would sit in separate areas of funeral homes. The immediate family would be in the main room where we are; the women relatives and their friends would be in another room, while the men would be in the third. The children would be with their mothers or sometimes in a room by themselves. The women would laugh, cry, and tell stories about Irene as we did last night. Then the matriarchs planned the funeral procession.

When one of the Fallon's died, the order of the funeral procession was paramount. The brothers and sisters of the person who had died were in the first set of cars by order of birth, the second set of cars was reserved for the half-brothers and sisters by order of birth, and the third set for the step-brothers and sisters by order of birth. Each funeral procession was unique.

Thank God, we are not here to plan a funeral procession. Our focus is on the liturgy and remembering and celebrating the life and death of Irene Fallon.

Irene Elizabeth Fallon was born on August 28, 1928 in Sheradon to Margaret and Joseph Fallon. Their sixth child, born on the birthday of Mother Seton, was baptized at Holy Innocents Church on September 16, 1928. Irene had six sisters: Margaret (Marge), Dolores (Dolly), Jean, Helen, Joan and Jane (the twins) and two brothers, William and Joseph. The Fallon family moved to Arizona after Irene's graduation from Elizabeth Seton High School. Her mother had severe asthma and the doctors suggested that a dry climate would help her health. Her father quit his job, sold the house, and the family moved to Phoenix. It was an act of faith and love. Irene told me, that the morning after they arrived, they bought a newspaper and everyone looked for jobs. They got them. The best news is that Irene's mother lived for 30 more years.

On September 8, 1949, Irene entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill from Saint Agnes Church in Phoenix Arizona. She left behind her family and friends. However, she had relatives in the Sisters of Charity and relatives and friends in Pittsburgh. Her Sister of Charity legacy included: Sister Isidore Boyce, Sister Mary Victor Fallon, her sister Joan and me. Sister Mary Felix and Sister Alicia Cary were neighbors of her dad's and my dad's family on the South Side. Although she was homesick, she was in the presence of watchful and caring aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends. She became a primary school teacher and served in the Altoona-Johnstown, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, and Tucson Dioceses and in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

She loved little children and was an enthusiastic teacher. I remember visiting her at Saint John the Evangelist on the South Side where Sister Alicia Cary was the Sister Servant and principal, and at Saint Stephens in Hazelwood. You will recall that Sister Alicia had been her father's neighbor when he was growing up. Sister Irene told me that she had to behave because she would be reported to Greensburg and Phoenix. Her longest tenure (1967-1986) was at Saint Theresa in Phoenix.

Her ministry changed. She became director of religious education at Saint Theresa and later at Saint Bridget in Mesa; she served as pastoral assistant at

Blessed Sacrament in Phoenix and at Saint Elizabeth Seton in Sun City. Prior to returning to Caritas Christi, she did spiritual renewal and direction at the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Phoenix.

Along the way, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from Seton Hill University, a Masters of Arts in Education from Arizona State University, and a Masters of Religious Education from Seattle University.

When we were engaged in the capital campaign to build our motherhouse, we spent time in Arizona. Sister Irene, our broker, had many priest friends, loyal parents and parishioners in the Arizona church. She arranged for us to make appeals, take up collections, give homilies (I will never forget the one on Trinity Sunday) and talk about the Sisters of Charity to anyone who would listen. Little did we know that she would live at Caritas Christi and enjoy the fruits of her considerable and very quiet efforts to help build our motherhouse.

As I was preparing this eulogy, I listened to an interview that Sister Marie Corona Miller had with Irene in 2003, shortly after Sister Irene came to Caritas Christi. She reflected on the happy times as a Sister of Charity, recalling her school days and the Sisters that she lived with on the missions. Even when she talked about the sad times, the death of her parents, and her own battle with shingles and post herpetic nerve pain that hastened her retirement, and her grief when ministries and churches were closed, she was optimistic and hopeful. I thought it would be good to hear Irene's voice and laughter. The selections we will play are a set of bookends, beginning with a description of a self-made crisis and ending when she returned to Greensburg to convalesce after surgery.

Irene you told me that God told you to come to the Sisters of Charity. I think He had another journey in mind. Go with the angels, Irene and may you have eternal joy and peace.

Funeral Liturgy Reflection

Sister Rosemary Donley

November 12, 2019