

## REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER MARIE CLARE FARABAUGH

### June 16, 1924 – September 15, 2021



For more than 150 years since our community began to form in Altoona, we have gathered one at a time. Sometimes, in the early days, in small groups. Later, in the 1950s and 60s, sometimes in groups of twenty or thirty—but always one-at-a time. The gift of each unique life was given and received to become who we are—the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill.

We must never underestimate this miracle of grace. And at the time of each sister's death in these latter days, we have the opportunity to spend some time pondering the life of one of our sisters who is now the almost one-in-a-thousand women who has made possible everything we have been able to do in response to the call of God. Sister Marie Clare is the 953<sup>rd</sup> Sister to have died since 1870.

Our Provincial Office holds a record of each sister's life—a file that contains events, dates, places she served, things she has accomplished, lots of things she might have even herself forgotten. Today, we are fortunate to have such a record of Sister Marie Clare Farabaugh.

On June 16, 1924, Sister Marie Clare was born one of thirteen children—ten boys and three girls—to Sylvester and Anna O'Connell Farabaugh in Saint Leo Parish, Altoona and was baptized on June 22, 1924.

On July 14, 1941, the pastor, Father John E. O'Connor wrote a brief and to-the-point letter to the Sisters of Charity, Greensburg, Pennsylvania:

*Dear Sisters,*

*Mary Louise Farabaugh, a young lady from Saint Leo's congregation who finished Sophomore in Catholic High the past year, informs me that you are willing to accept her in your novitiate this year. Therefore I gladly recommend her as a girl who is obedient, accommodating, and bears a good reputation. Also, she is pious. A family trait is to do things well, and I believe that under your direction, Mary Louise will prove herself desirable, and a worthy member of your community.*

*With every kind wish and asking remembrance in your prayers, I am*

*Sincerely yours in Christ,  
John E. O'Connor*

Later, Marie Clare wrote, "My parents were overjoyed at the thought of one of their children being called to serve God as a religious."

On January 3, 1999, Marie Clare was nominated to receive the Manifesting the Kingdom award for her 14 years of service to Pittsburgh elementary school children and 20 years of untiring work as activity director at Kane Regional Center in Glen Hazel. The nomination reads:

*Dedication, faith, good humor and a straightforward approach mark her interactions with staff and residents. . . . Both her work in therapeutic recreation and her hearty and compassionate presence manifest Kingdom values of inclusion, wholeness, and respect for persons.*

One of our nurses at Caritas Christi told me that she had also served at Glen Hazel. "It was a tough neighborhood," she observed.

When Marie Clare moved into the field of recreational therapy, she wasn't just flitting from one thing to another—to something other than teaching fourth and fifth grades. She prepared seriously for a new competency, different from that required of an elementary teacher, by spending two years at Penn State where she acquired certification as a recreational therapist.

Recreational therapy is a field of study in which professionals learn to treat and help maintain the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of their clients by seeking to reduce depression, stress, and anxiety; recover basic motor functioning and reasoning abilities; build confidence; and socialize effectively. Certification as a recreation therapist requires 300 hours of training. 200 of the 300 hours must involve working at the discretion of the academic advisor with individuals who have disabling conditions.

In the Spring 1999 Celebration, Sister Colette Toler wrote:

*A recent article called Marie Clare "the Activities Director of Glen Hazel Regional Center. That is accurate, but it does not begin to catch the nuances of this bolt-of-fire-in-action, Sister Marie Clare Farabaugh.*

Marie Clare had begun her work in recreational therapy at Kane Hospital, a two-thousand-bed county facility. When Kane was divided into four, smaller regional hospitals, she moved to the Glen Hazel Center. Marie Clare's natural gifts of enthusiasm, energy, and rapport with people have enabled her to maintain a good-natured, straightforward approach to hospital staff and residents. During the next 21 years, she extended her education yet again at Ann Arbor, Penn State, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Tuscaloosa, and Dallas. At Glen Hazel, she worked with persons aged 13 to 105.

When I read Father O'Connor's comment in his letter recommending Mary Louise

Farabaugh to the Community: "A family trait is to do things well," I recalled Marie Clare often saying, "My Dad would always say, "If you can't do something for someone, what good are you?"

Indeed, Marie, you have showed us in a hundred ways: "What good?"

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection*

*Sister Gertrude Foley*

*September 20, 2021*