

MEMORIAL MASS June 30, 2021

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (John 20:18)

These words of Jesus are often quoted in various contexts, and we know that Jesus is always with us especially when we gather together in His name. Today we are gathered in prayer on an unusual occasion: to remember, honor, and offer prayer for three of our Sisters. In some ways this speaks to the strong community among the Sisters of Charity.

As we remember these Sisters, let us marvel at all they were called to do during their lives as Sisters of Charity: “As a congregation we stand open to appeal, ready to respond and willing to serve wherever the Church and the world most needs us.” (*Constitutions*, Chapter 1, Article 7) Let us think of the various ways our three Sisters, Sister Marie Corona Miller, Sister Eleanor Gibbons, Sister Mary Gertrude, carried out God’s call in their lives.

SISTER MARY GERTRUDE McELHINNY

August 20, 1928–February 15, 2021



Sister Mary Gertrude McElhinny, a quiet person of dignity and kindness, found herself called to serve God in a slightly different way from many other sisters.

Although she began life in Lincoln Place near Pittsburgh, the family longed to live in a country on the farm. Sadly, Sister Mary Gertrude's mother lost her eyesight when she was thirty-two years old

because of a tumor on the optic nerve. When surgery was unsuccessful, Mrs. McElhinny accepted a life of blindness, supported by her husband and children, especially perhaps, by Sister Mary Gertrude, her mother's namesake. The McElhinny family had a happy life on Willow Run farm. They moved there when Sister Mary Gertrude was sixteen. She felt called to be a Sister of Charity like her aunts, Sister Miriam Joseph and Sister Mary Peter Murphy. Although Sister Mary Gertrude felt this call, she knew that her first obligation was to her mother who needed her so badly. She allowed her younger sister, Sister Mary Joseph, to enter a year before she did as younger members of the family assumed responsibility.

The first twenty years of Sister Mary Gertrude's religious life were devoted to earning a degree from Seton Hill University and teaching primary grades as well as being a school administrator in the Dioceses of Altoona-Johnstown, Greensburg and Erie. Sister Mary Gertrude's life then took another turn: back to Willow Run Farm and family needs. Sister Mary Gertrude's mother had died and her father needed care. She found a teaching position at a nearby Catholic school. Sister Mary Gertrude also began working during this time as a coordinator of religious education. Once, at our request, Sister Mary Gertrude made an

impressive presentation to the Sisters at Caritas Christi about her creative work in the field of religious education. After fourteen years in religious education, Sister Mary Gertrude moved into pastoral ministry, still in the rural Linesville and Greenville area. There are wonderful stories about her activities as well as accounts of Sister Mary Joseph's work there with her sister. There were activities for young people, and for those in a group called "Young at Heart." Sister Mary Gertrude established in the parish and then in the Diocese "Care and Comfort" groups called "Michael's Mantle." These volunteers visited the sick, comforted those mourning, and initiated a food bank. Local college students were engaged in all these works.

So, the young woman from Linesville spent her life in love and service to her parents, to her nine brothers and sisters, to children in several schools, to the people of Mercer County. Perhaps not the life she expected as a Sister of Charity. Like Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, though, she had a deep desire to reflect God's presence in the world. Sister Mary Gertrude McElhinny fulfilled her dream.

We remember Sister Marie Corona, Sister Eleanor, Sister Mary Gertrude and all our Sisters, living and deceased, in the Company of Charity who have dedicated their lives to serving God and God's people, always reflecting God's love.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Brigid Marie Grandey
June 30, 2021*