



Sister Mary Vaughn, OP

Born to earthly life: March 28, 1934
Religious profession: August 15, 1954
Entered eternal life: October 2, 2018

“Whoever receives one child in my name
... receives me.”

Matthew 18:5

WHO KNOWS HOW MANY CHILDREN SISTER MARY VAUGHN received in her 44 years of teaching! As a middle-schooler herself, Mary Elizabeth Vaughn decided she would grow up to be a teacher because she loved working with and helping children. Even at that young age, she had quite a resumé. As the second oldest of 12 children, “I would go home from school and take care of the younger kids.” She noted in her oral history that her older sister didn’t enjoy child care, so Mary was their mother’s primary helper.

Mary and twin sister Marilynne were born on March 28, 1934, to Eugene and Beulah Vaughn of Kenosha, WI. Nine children followed (two more sets of twins), and Mary enjoyed caring for all of them.

More than half of S. Mary’s teaching years were spent at Urban Day School in Milwaukee, WI. Her profound impact upon students, their families and staff was warmly witnessed through the many personal stories shared at S. Mary’s remembering service. “Urban Day wouldn’t have been the same without her,” the mother of three of S. Mary’s students said.

Upon retiring from teaching, S. Mary entered her second career, retreat ministry, where she was just as deeply loved and respected. For 20 years, she was an integral presence at Siena Retreat Center, willing to help with whatever was needed – greeting and praying for retreatants, cleaning, making beds, etc. A skill for which she is especially well known is that of matting and framing pictures, no matter how large or small. The stunning results of her talent can be seen in the retreat center and throughout Siena Center.

“Both of Mary’s ministries could be described as an open door,” reflected S. Kathy Slesar. “Mary opened doors for people, not just when she greeted them at the retreat center, but also through her teaching. She opened doors of hope and opportunities for a better life for her students and their families. She also opened doors of justice. She lived our mission, *committed to truth, compelled to justice* in numerous ways. She impacted more lives than we will ever know.”

S. Mary loved fun, whether it be playing baseball, camping, drinking in nature’s beauty, or cheering on the Brewers and Packers. And her great devotion to St. Joseph was closely connected with her love for working with wood. Faith and prayer were her sustenance. At the end, she was looking forward to seeing her God and reuniting with her parents and siblings.

Upon hearing S. Mary had died, someone observed, “We lost a little giant today.” Indeed, an apt description of the unassuming, spirited, dedicated, humble, tenacious person – small in stature, perhaps, but epitomizing an unwavering determination to advocate for justice and to stand firmly with those subject to systemic injustice. Her childhood experience of making do with little instilled her with empathy for people, especially children, living in poverty. “She understood their condition in her very bones,” S. Mary’s house mates, Ss. Dolores Catanach and Rita Lui noted. “During her last illness, when the chaplain asked if she had any special prayer intention, she consistently responded: ‘For the children of the world.’”

“Mary was deeply relational,” they added. “She welcomed each person she met without judgment. She closed her life as she lived it, using her last conscious days asking us to contact so many people dear to her to thank them and say she loved them. She wanted to bring her life to close in gratitude and respect, leaving no one out.” The parting gesture from a little giant who “impacted more lives than we will ever know,” and who is deeply missed.