

Sister Mary Fran Willcoxson, OP



Born to Earthly Life on November 3, 1944
First Profession on August 15, 1965
Entered Eternal Life on January 12, 2025

MARY FRANCES was born on November 3, 1944 to Joseph and Frances Willcoxson in Detroit, Michigan. She was one of five Willcoxson children and they attended Assumption Grotto Parish and School. Mary Fran was an active child who loved to learn. She enjoyed playing and coaching sports, playing piano and guitar, embroidery, gardening and baking. She had several

Dominican Sisters as teachers and when she felt her call to religious life, she knew it would be as a Racine Dominican Sister. She made her first profession in 1965 and her final vows in 1974. She was given the religious name S. Ann Joseph of the Holy Family before going back to her baptismal name.

She received a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics from Dominican College in Racine, a Master's in Mathematics from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan and a Master's degree in Administrative Leadership and Counseling from University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

S. Mary Fran was a teacher for more than 20 years. She began her ministry as a math and science teacher at St. John in Little Chute and St. Catherine's High School in Racine. She then moved to Spectrum High School in Milwaukee, an alternative high school for young women. She began at Spectrum as a math and computer teacher before moving into Administration. S. Mary Fran was invested in the lives of these young women, wanting them to succeed academically and to become their own person. She believed in the good and the power of women in their ability to be resilient, holistic and authors of their own lives.

S. Mary Fran brought all these gifts with her to her ministry at Daystar – a transitional housing option for women victims of domestic violence in Milwaukee. Daystar offered survivors long-term housing, support groups, counseling and job search assistance to help women get back on their feet and live an independent life. As S. Mary Fran said, "Seeing lives changed and seeing women begin to believe in their own goodness was a grace-filled journey."

In her own life, S. Mary Fran recognized the Spirit's call to wholeness, health and balance. She was creative – painting, creating her own cards, playing and writing music, singing praise and drawing forth the gifts of others to be shared. She was crafty, loved gardening and appreciated the friends in her life. She was generous, determined, insightful and had a mighty laugh. Mary Fran was prayerful and a woman of the Word.

Her life took a new direction after her diagnosis of Myasthenia Gravis. She saw this diagnosis as "a whole new journey" and she committed herself to raising awareness of this disease in the greater community. S. Mary Fran saw God at work in her diagnosis, even in the difficulties, and she was more aware of the gifts she has been given.

In a world that doesn't always see beauty in our differences, S. Mary Fran not only saw it but helped others to see it as well. She said, "We need to be in relationship – to be respectful, non-judgmental, loving and empowering to people, whether we agree with them or not. Showing people God's love is there for them, that's what makes a difference in the world." S. Mary Fran, may you now know God's embrace, love and peace.

