



Sister Mary Ellen Paulson, OP

Born to earthly life: April 8, 1928
Religious profession: August 15, 1950
Entered eternal life: August 17, 2020

"Let's make our world a better place; let each one take some part in spreading goodness everywhere..." S. Mary Ellen Paulson

CATHERINE ANN was the first-born of Margaret and Norman Paulson's five children. She was born in Milwaukee, WI, on Easter Sunday and considered her entire life an Alleluia. Her family moved to a farm near Mauston when she was small. Her brothers Kenneth and Duane are the only surviving members of her family.

"Growing up on a forty-acre farm provided a gentle experience of living in tune with nature: the stars, the storms, the hills and rocks, a few cows, two horses, chickens, pigs, occasionally sheep and a goat," she reflected. Years later as Racine Dominican Sister Mary Ellen, she was a strong supporter of the community's creation of the Eco-Justice Center, bringing new generations valued experiences she cherished from her youth.

With an Irish Catholic mother and a Norwegian Lutheran father, the Paulson children experienced "prayer as a regular and vital part of living," S. Mary Ellen said. As a little girl, she knew what she wanted to do with her life and announced it to her family. "I'm going to be a sister," she said. Someone laughed, and thereafter she kept the ambition to herself until she was a senior in high school.

Indeed, she became a Racine Dominican Sister, dedicating 60 years to educating children and youth as teacher, principal, assistant superintendent, school psychologist and substitute teacher. "I have always been proud of my calling and the tremendous grace to answer the call with prayers daily for the students I've had in school," she noted when celebrating her 60th jubilee. She kept a list of all the students she had ever taught – from her third graders at Racine's St. Rose in 1948 to all those she taught through 2010 in her 25 years as a substitute teacher for Milwaukee Public Schools. When parents asked not to be forgotten, she added them to her prayer list, too!

Teaching was a great delight for S. Mary Ellen, but not her only passion. She was an active member of the Women Voters of Milwaukee County for many years. "We worked to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and we influenced public policy through education and advocacy," she explained.

She was also dedicated to libraries, helping to found the Friends of the West Allis Public Library in 1985. She served three terms as president of the organization, as well as trustee and then president of the West Allis Public Library Board of Directors.

S. Mary Ellen was a longtime member of the Dominican Institute for the Arts (DIA). "She was a treasure to us ... a gifted poet, she had a poem for just about everything!" noted S. Pat Daly, president of the DIA. Learning of S. Mary Ellen's death, one member said, "Mary Ellen herself was a poem as she delighted in life and spread Dominican joy." In 2011, S. Mary Ellen and dear friend S. Paula Marie Jarosz received the DIA Spirit Recognition Award, acknowledging their significant service to the spirit of the DIA mission.

S. Mary Ellen's three nephews, sons of youngest brother Ken, all agreed that "the sky for her was a little brighter and the rainbow's colors were more vivid. And if there ever was a Mrs. Rogers, she was it! She had such enthusiasm for life and enjoyed God's creation."

Yes, S. Mary Ellen's life was indeed an Alleluia. In her 92 years, this Easter-born child was ever filled with joy and gratitude.