

**SISTER M. LAVERNE RELLI O.S.F. (Rose) 689**

**Born:** February 24, 1906 in London, England  
**Parents:** Louis and Mary (Medici) Bulgarelli  
**Postulancy:** September 5, 1927  
**Novitiate:** August 12, 1928  
**First Profession:** August 12, 1930  
**Final Profession:** August 12, 1933  
**Died:** Tuesday, July 23, 1991 at 7:23 a.m.  
at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet



**Ministry:**

1930 - 1935 St. Francis Academy, Joliet, IL, Typing, Shorthand,  
Bookkeeping, French  
1935 - 1936 University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, Student  
1936 - 1974 College of St. Francis, Joliet, IL, Department of English,  
Journalism and Speech  
1974 - 1976 Piper's Playhouse, Joliet, Illinois, Director  
1976 - 1977 St. Francis Convent, Joliet, Illinois, Tutor  
1977 - 1991 St. Francis Convent, Joliet, Illinois, Teacher of  
Communication Arts  
January, 1991 Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet, Illinois

**Memorial Mass:** Friday, July 26, 1991 at 7 p.m. in the Motherhouse  
Chapel

Survived by sister, Mrs. Joanne Vanderbilt of Coronado, CA

*For those who have been faithful, O Lord,  
life is not ended, but merely changed.*

On Tuesday morning, July 23, 1991, at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, after five long months of suffering as a result of a stroke, our Sister LaVerne Relli was born to life eternal.

To tell the story of the life of Sister LaVerne is to be involved in a drama. She proudly claimed the "land of Shakespeare", London England, as her birth place. There, on February 24, 1906, Rose was born, the eldest of five children, to Maria and Louis Bulgarelli. Today she is survived by her sister Joanne, and many devoted nieces and nephews.

During those first years of her life she spent a year in Italy, finally sailing for America when she was five years old. Her natural talent for acting was obvious even when she was a child. She delighted in telling the story of how she would perform for the customers at her father's Fry Fish Shoppe, eagerly gathering her two-pence awards in her green box.

When the immigrant family settled in Chicago, Illinois, she soon became a regular customer at the "nickle and dime" theatres near her home. With all her heart she wanted to become an actress. She worked in a factory to save money for drama and dance lessons. At the age of sixteen she started working as a secretary, helping to support her family, and saving her money for private lessons. She became an active member of a drama group in the city.

There was another desire growing in her heart those years. She was twelve years old before she ever met a Sister. When she became a high school student at St. Procopius High School in Chicago, she met our Sister Lioba, who became very influential in her life. Her decision to come to religious life was not an easy one. She wrote how she resisted the idea. "It was only when I asked the question, 'When I died what do I wish I would have done with my life?' that I decided to come to the convent."

She came to 520 when she was twenty-one years old. She had only one request, "Mother Thomasine, I'll enter the community provided you will not ask me to have anything to do with the theatre!" Mother wrote those words in her little black book. Three years later she asked Sister LaVerne to reconsider her request, pointing out the need to develop a department of Speech and Drama at the College of St. Francis. Sister LaVerne said "yes", and thus began her life-long ministry as teacher and director in the field of speech and drama.

In 1978 she received the well deserved honor of Professor Emeritis for her magnificent contribution to the College of St. Francis. During her ministry of thirty-eight years at the College, she founded and built Speech and Drama to a major Department. In 1936 she founded the CSF Players, (directing over 70 three-act plays and 100 one-act plays.) It was under her leadership that the Radio Workshop, Children's Theatre and Speech Clinic were developed.



She became a teacher of teachers. "We teach by who we are! We must inspire our students to believe in themselves. We must give them creative opportunities to develop the power within them."

Her spirit was one of responsiveness to the requests of her Congregation, requests she often felt were beyond her abilities. In 1945, "equipped with a small viewer, splicer and scotch tape, I burned the midnight oil" to produce the Vocation Movie, In the Service of the King. In 1965 she produced and directed the Bells of St. Francis, a magnificent performance celebrating the Centennial Year of the Joliet Franciscans.

She had her share of disappointment and suffering too. She spoke of the "Great Almost of 1965...the cancellation of plans to construct a new theatre on campus... We had the gobblet ready to quaff the wine..." She suffered from severe back pain, yet always answered our "How are you?" with a smile and "I am well in the Lord."

She loved the Congregation, and remained loyal through the many changes following Vatican II. She challenged us through her life and words to be true to the fire of our Franciscan call. "The spirit of our Sisters is the spirit of Francis. It is a spirit forever...in the Service of the King."

A few years ago she wrote, "As the length of life is shortened, the feeling for life is heightened." When she retired to the Motherhouse in 1974 she remained alert and eager to take all opportunities to deepen her spiritual life, and remained active in ministry. This past fall she was a student in a poetry class at CSF, and until the day of her stroke remained active in her ministry of teaching creative dramatics to young children.

Those who shared community life with her have been touched forever by her goodness. She always had time for an encouraging word, a challenging thought, an expression of support. We remember her delight in attending a recent performance of Les Miserables, and her competitive spirit in a good game of ping pong.

She told the story of playing the part of Dream in an eighth Grade dramatic production. She always remembered this line..."I am as old as the Garden of Eden, and as young as a child's heart." Truly this is our memory of Sister LaVerne. We thank you Sister for your sixty-three years as our Sister. We will miss you!

May you perform for all eternity, as you lived your life, "In the Service of the King." Amen! Alleluia!