

# *Sisters of St. Francis*

o f M a r y I m m a c u l a t e

After living with challenging health issues for many years, Sister Jo Anne Murphy slipped away from us peacefully on November 28, 2023, at Ascension Villa Franciscan Place.

Jo Anne was born on April 6, 1947, in Chicago, to Joseph Murphy and Elizabeth (Nowak) Murphy. She was the oldest of a large family of siblings when her mother died in 1957. Though only ten years old, Jo Anne stepped in with a mother's heart to care for one brother and six sisters. Her responsibilities grew when her father remarried and her stepmother, Jeanette (Szot) gave birth to three more girls.

After graduating from St. Francis de Sales High School in Chicago in 1965, Jo Anne entered the community of Joliet Franciscans, received the name Sister Miriam James as a novice, and made her profession of vows in 1968. At that time, Jo Anne said, "I felt God and I were going to be partners for life." In college, she majored in math. Her quick mind made her an ideal student of computer technology and she was an early pioneer in the community for computer trouble-shooting. Sister Marie Miller, one of Jo Anne's classmates, said there were two dynamics at work within her: the heart of a mother and a computer brain.

From 1969 to 1982, Jo Anne worked in Illinois elementary schools first as a math teacher, then as a principal. By 1983, she was a math instructor at the College of St. Francis in Joliet and a computer specialist for Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home. In January of 1985, her computer skills continued to grow as she became the programmer for Household Finance Corporation in Northbrook, Illinois, for four years, then the manager of data processing operations at the College of St. Francis for three years.

# Alleluia!



*Sister Jo Anne Murphy OSF*

This "computer brain" continued to be accompanied by her "motherly heart." Progressing through religious life, Sister Jo Anne saw herself growing in understanding herself as "a woman with a mind of my own, capable of much love and affection. Central to the question of what I can bring to the Church and to my Congregation is God's love for me and for others. I sense a need everywhere for understanding, compassion, and respect."

Sister Jo Anne's professional work from 1992 to 2012 included managing the executive office for Franciscan Futures in Joliet, office manager for the Vicar for Religious in Chicago, and being the Human Resources Information Systems Manager for the Archdiocese of Chicago. Along the way, her heart...so big, so compassionate, so giving...began to feel a stress that would challenge her for the rest of her days.

Jo Anne designed the booklet for her class's 40<sup>th</sup> Jubilee in 2008. The theme was "Be still and know the God within." Classmate Sister Roberta Naegele said the theme spoke well about Jo Anne's life search. She told Roberta that her illness really connected her with compassion. "She empathizes purely and connects to the heart of one's suffering," said

Roberta. "She wizened throughout the years of illness, becoming insightful, gentled, softened."

All of her classmates enjoyed her humor. Through humor, Jo Anne shared her viewpoint on the world. When they were together, they always set each other off laughing. Her nature was joyful and lighthearted. She was fun and easy to laugh with. But Sister Roberta said, "Jo Anne's understanding of joy went deep as she aged. She developed inner joy."

In 1987, Jo Anne had looked over her professional history and realized she was driving herself too hard. She resolved to let go of the drive and chose a quote from the community's Constitutions to focus her ministry: "...letting the spirit of prayer permeate the whole..." (pp. 10,11). Years later, while doing volunteer ministry from 2016-2022 at Will County Jail in Joliet, Sister Jo Anne discovered the transformative power of mandala work. During one whole year, she drew a mandala every day while at prayer. She taught this to the women at the jail and was very happy to see how they could find deep emotional connections through this work. Today, the mandala art that was hanging in Jo Anne's room at the Villa is the cover picture on her funeral Mass Program. The funeral theme is "We will show you the path of life" and a mandala is about the journey of life.

Sister Jo Anne's large family and her Franciscan community have both meant a great deal to her. As she traveled, vacationed, and visited with her adult siblings, she must have surely looked back on the challenging years of their childhood and marveled at where their journeys had taken each of them. Her own journey as a Franciscan called her to "develop an understanding of my values for community based on how we live together, not on some paper guidelines from the past."

Jo Anne's journey was filled with love, laughter, work, joy, commitment, and suffering. In 1973, when preparing to renew her vows in a final and permanent pledge, she said, "My goal is to witness God's love by doing His will for me each day as best I can. At the time of her 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee in 2018, Sister Jo Anne summed up her memories of many ministries by saying that most involved some form of "bringing good things to life." She described the depth of her joy as "more richly felt after living through difficulties or struggling to be simply honest." Loving all creatures and all people as expressions of God's love was the quality in St. Francis that she most wanted to emulate.

Dear Jo Anne, although your physical heart failed, your ability to love never did. Pray for us and wait for us to someday join you. Be joyful and at peace in the loving arms of God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Alleluia Letter written by Sr. Karen Berry, OSF**

# *Sister Jo Anne Murphy, OSF*

*April 6, 1947—November 28, 2023*

*Born:* April 6, 1947  
*Parents:* Joseph F. Murphy and Elizabeth Nowak  
*Postulancy:* September 5, 1965  
*Novitiate:* August 13, 1966  
*First Profession:* August 12, 1968  
*Final Profession:* November 24, 1973  
*Entered New Life:* November 28, 2023

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## **Ministry History**

1973-1975 Teacher: Mathematics, St. Raymond, Joliet, Illinois  
1975-1976 Student: University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois  
1976-1978 Principal: St. Matthew, Champaign  
1978-1982 Principal: St. John, Joliet, Illinois  
1982-1983 Participant: House of Affirmation, Webster Groves, Missouri  
1983-1985 Adjunct Instructor: Mathematics, College of St. Francis, Joliet  
Computer Specialist: Our Lady of Angels, Joliet  
1985 Student: Computer Programming, Household Finance Corporation  
1985-1988 Computer Programmer, Household International, Northbrook, Illinois  
1988-1991 Manager/Data Processing Operator: St. Francis College, Joliet  
1991-1996 Executive Office Manager: Office of Franciscan Futures, Joliet  
1996-1999 Office Manager/Vicar for Religious: Chicago, Illinois  
1999-2000 Technical Specialist Personnel Specialist: Archdiocese of Chicago, Chicago  
2001-2015 Human Resources Information Systems Manager: Archdiocese of Chicago, Chicago  
2015-2022 Volunteer: Will County Jail, Joliet  
2022-2023 Volunteer: Broadview Illinois Deportation Society, Broadview, Illinois  
2023 Ministry of Presence and Prayer: Ascension Villa Franciscan, Joliet

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*Interment:* Section 8, Lot 329, Grave 12B, Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, Illinois  
*Predeceased by:* Her parents, Joseph F. Murphy and Elizabeth Nowak  
*Survived by:* Her brother Daniel (Linda) Murphy and her nine sisters: Patricia (William) Stade, Janet (Roberto) Hernandez, Rita Murphy, Teresa (Tim) Glossinger, Peggy (Jeff) Meisenhelder, Elizabeth (Bruce) LaFrance, Kate Murphy, Maureen (Darrin) Wood, and Laurie (George) Gertz, many nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, and colleagues

*Rest in Peace, Sister Jo Anne!*