



## *Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate*

Late in the evening, on Saturday, June 23, 2018, our sister, Jeanette Willenborg, peacefully entered into eternity after a generously lived and joyfully travelled life journey that, in the estimation of those who loved her, concluded all too soon. Franciscan to the core of her very being, Jeanette, like St. Francis, chose to spend her final days on earth in the sacred space dedicated to Our Lady of Angels, surrounded by family, longtime friends and her Joliet Franciscan sisters, to await the anticipated coming of Sister Death.

Born to her parents, Shirley (Bushue) and Virgil Willenborg, on November 24, 1948, Jeanette was one of eleven children. Growing up in Lillyville, Illinois, her life was shaped by faith, love, hard work, and occasional hardships. She grew up in a Catholic farming community with strong German immigrant roots and a cultural and religious cohesiveness that united families and communities in life-giving ways. For Jeanette, the example and influence of the Joliet Franciscans who were her teachers and mentors made a deep impression upon her. Following in the footsteps of generations of many other young women from neighboring towns, Jeanette began to discern a vocation to Franciscan life which ultimately resulted in the Willenborgs joining the caravan of families from that area making regularly scheduled pilgrimages to Joliet, Illinois.

On September 11, 1966, Jeanette entered the postulancy of the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate and began her studies in elementary education at the College of St. Francis. Upon entering the novitiate a year later, on August 12, 1967, as the winds of change brought about by Vatican II tossed and turned the boats of many young religious, Jeanette remained steady amidst the turbulence of uncertainty and the departures of several companions. Professing her First Vows on August 12, 1969, she completed her undergraduate studies and was certified to teach in the State of Illinois. In August of 1970 Sister Jeanette was assigned to SS. Peter and Paul Parish on the Southeast side of Chicago, historically speaking, one of the Congregation's flagship parochial schools.

Making the most of her Franciscan vocation, her passion for the ministry of teaching was evident in every aspect of her day to day life. Indeed, there was something quite unique and resilient about this farm girl from Central Illinois who learned to thrive in a multicultural urban city setting surrounded by factories and refineries. Somehow, she knew how to plant seeds in unfamiliar ground. And trusting her

# *Alleluia!*



*Sister M. Jeanette Willenborg, CSF*

instincts, she cultivated them, attentively and tenderly, and patiently waited for them to sprout and grow - and flourish they did. Undaunted by school closings and consolidations, Sr. Jeanette remained committed to serving the educational, social and spiritual needs of Hispanic, African American and ethnic white children - and their families - come what may. With a clarity of vision and unwavering commitment to quality education for all, she brought creativity, energy, enthusiasm and a faith filled spirit to every classroom in which she found herself - from Chicago, Illinois, to Boulder, Colorado to Effingham, Illinois.

Devoted to building and sustaining community among her Franciscan Sisters and Associates, Sr. Jeanette had a gift for living simply, centering her life in prayer, always making way for a few card games and taking one day at a time. Resonating with the spirituality of Mother Alfred she committed her way to God and trusted that God would act. Acknowledging the weight of reality that is so often present in the twists and turns of life, she endeavored to shoulder the weight of reality and found ways of carrying it - with fortitude, hope and grace, and always a bit of laughter.

Recognized by many for her excellence as an outstanding Catholic educator and formative influence on students, their families and communities, she received the Nathan Jones Special Achievement Award by the Chicago Catholic Schools and was named the 74th Annual Educator of the Year by the South Chicago Chamber of Commerce. Sr. Jeanette was a living witness to the imperatives of Gospel-based education in bringing about racial justice, justice for immigrants and justice for working communities made vulnerable by shifts in economy and politics. Her activism was founded on changing and improving the world one child at a time. As she now lives fully into mystery of the prayer "open the eyes of my heart, Lord," let us pray with deep gratitude to the Lord of Glory for the life and legacy of our Sister Jeanette.

Alleluia. Alleluia.

## *Sister M. Jeanette Willenborg, OSF*

*November 24, 1948 — June 23, 2018*

*Born:* November 24, 1948  
*Parents:* Virgil H. Willenborg and Shirley Ann (Bushue) Willenborg  
*Postulancy:* September 11, 1966  
*Novitiate:* August 12, 1967  
*First Profession:* August 12, 1969  
*Perpetual Final Vows:* April 30, 1977  
*Entered New Life:* June 23, 2018

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### **Ministry History**

1969-1970 Student: College of St. Francis, Joliet, Illinois  
1970-1976 Teacher: Grades 3, 4, St. Andrew, Romeoville, Illinois  
1976-1984 Teacher: Grades 3, 5, SS. Peter and Paul, Chicago, Illinois  
1984-1994 Teacher: Grade 3, Jesus Our Brother, Chicago  
1994-2005 Teacher: Grade 2, Our Lady Gate of Heaven School, Chicago  
2005-2009 Teacher: Grade 4, St. Michael's Catholic School, Chicago  
2009-2010 In Transition  
2010-2016 Teacher: Grade 2, Sacred Heart of Jesus School, Boulder, Colorado  
2016-2018 Family Ministry, Teutopolis, Illinois  
2018 Ministry of Prayer and Presence: Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet

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*Wake/Prayer Service:* Saturday, June 30, 2018, 10:00 a.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet

*Memorial Mass:* Saturday, June 30, 2018, 11:00 a.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet

*Predeceased by:* By her father, Virgil H. Willenborg and her sister Mary Ann Willenborg

*Survived by:* Her mother, Shirley Ann (Bushue) Willenborg; her brothers, Fr. Henry, OFM, Bernard (Marian) and Richard (Anna Mae); and her sisters, Carol (Ken) Brummer, Laura (Jim) Niendiek, Dolores (Bill) Kreke, Connie Levitt, Brenda (Jeff) Weishaar and Dorothy (Sam) Haarman

*Rest in Peace, Sister Jeanette!*