

Sister Gilmary Lawlor, CSA

Sister Gilmary (Joan Marie) Lawlor, 66, died on Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at St. Francis Home.

On July 31, 1942, in New York City, Irene and Walter Lawlor welcomed their first child, Joan Marie. Within the next ten years the family moved to Yonkers, NY, and welcomed three more children: a boy, a girl, and a boy. Big sister Joan organized children and activities not only for her own siblings, but for neighborhood children as well. She loved sports, pitched for baseball games (even having her own glove), and played a marvelous game of marbles.



Joan attended the parish grade school at Sacred Heart and Elizabeth Seton High School in Yonkers. At Sacred Heart she met the Sisters of St. Agnes, some of whom were her teachers in grade school. Impressed with the happiness she saw in them, she entered the congregation in 1960, professing first vows as Sister Gilmary in 1963. Her love for Mary, the Mother of God, led her to choose and cherish her name, which means “Servant of Mary.”

Early on Sister Gilmary had a desire to minister as a missionary in Nicaragua. That was not to be, but her missionary heart found its place in her life as a teacher. With a bachelor’s degree in education from Marian College and later an M.S. Ed. from Fordham (her father’s alma mater), Sister Gilmary ministered in education in Wisconsin, Kansas, and New York from 1964 until her recent illness brought her to Fond du Lac in July of this year. For nearly 35 of those years she taught in elementary classrooms from grades one through six. She was also an effective principal in St. Jerome’s in the Bronx from 1988-1997. Since then she has been teaching third graders at Immaculate Conception in the Bronx.

Friends describe Sister Gilmary as a deeply spiritual person, one who expressed her spirituality not in words but in the way she lived. Her greatest quality was her ability to relate to people, bringing peace and a positive spirit wherever she was. She had a unique ability to calm an irate child or parent, to control a rambunctious classroom, or to bring peace to a troubled heart. Everyone was important to her and she let them know it: from the janitor to the cook to the smallest child to the greatest teacher. Sister Gilmary had delighted in bringing surprises to her younger siblings when she was big sister Joan, a trait she carried into her life as a community member, as a teacher and as principal. Her love of sports never left her either, as she was a quiet but devoted fan of the New York Yankees and the Green Bay Packers. In short she loved people, life, and God and it showed. She will leave an empty space in the lives of those she touched.

Sister Gilmary is survived by one sister: Sister Clare Lawlor, CSA, Psy.D., of Downers Grove, IL; two brothers, Christopher (Sally) Lawlor of Westerly, RI, and Mark Lawlor and Adrienne Aron of Berkeley, CA; nephews Matthew and Timothy Lawlor; and the Sisters of St. Agnes with whom she lived, prayed, and ministered.

Preceding her in death are her parents, Irene Stewart Kerr Lawlor and Judge Walter Edward Lawlor.

Visitation: Visitation for Sister Gilmary will be held on Sunday, November 9, 2008, from 3:00 until 7:00 p.m. and from 8:00 to 9:15 a.m. on Monday, November 10, at Nazareth Court and Center, 375 Gillett Street, Fond du Lac. A prayer service will be held at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday.

Services: A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 9:30 a.m. on Monday, November 10, 2008, in the St. Francis Home Chapel, 33 Everett Street, Fond du Lac. Father Edward Sippel will preside. Burial will follow at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery.

The Sisters of St. Agnes are grateful to the nurses and staff of Nazareth Court and Center, Hospice Hope, and St. Francis Home for their care of Sister Gilmary in these last months.