

Sister Mary Ellen Johnston, CSA

Sister Mary Ellen Johnston, CSA, baptized Bridget Philomena, died peacefully October 31, 2023, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Bridget (Bridie to her family) the daughter of Edward Johnston and Ellen O'Connor Johnston, was born in County Sligo, Ireland, on October 23, 1920. Throughout her life, she treasured her memories of growing up on her family's farm with her six sisters and eight brothers. Life was simple, and though sometimes hard, it was filled with faith, joy and beauty. However, there were not many opportunities for a young woman to find meaningful employment. When Bridget was seventeen, her aunt came from Chicago, Illinois, to visit the Johnston family. She invited Bridget to return with her to the USA and to find work that suited her talents. Bridget gratefully accepted the invitation. She lived in Chicago with her aunt and uncle, finished her high school education, and enrolled in Business College. After a year of business classes, she secured a secretarial position. She also proudly became an American citizen after five years of residency and intense study.

Her attraction to religious life began at the age of thirteen when she read the life story of Madeleine-Sophie Barat, the founder of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Sophie's life stirred in Bridget an awareness that God may be calling her to do something special with her life. While working as a secretary in Chicago, Bridget began to think more seriously about becoming a sister. She and a friend would make a yearly retreat. It was at one of these retreat experiences that she first learned of the Sisters of St. Agnes. She was also influenced by her sister, Sister Marie Eugene Johnston, who became a Sister of St. Martha in France. When Sister Marie Eugene died during World War II, Bridget felt called to continue her sister's commitment to love God's people and be a source of light and inspiration. She entered St. Agnes Convent in September 1948. She made her first profession of vows in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes as Sister Mary Ellen on August 15, 1951, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.



Sister Mary Ellen earned a BS in Education from Marian College. For thirty-three years she shared the love of God with children and their families as a teacher, principal, tutor, and school secretary in parish schools in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois. Her students fondly remember her telling stories of her homeland and dancing the Irish jig for them on St. Patrick's Day. From 1984-1990, Sister served as an assistant in the administrative offices of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. Sister then spent happy years at Evanston, Illinois, volunteering as a tutor at St. Nicholas School and as an office assistant at St. Francis Hospital. In 1996, she moved to Tucson, Arizona, volunteering as an office assistant, parish visitor, and tutor for St. Augustine's Catholic Church, the Life Directions USA program, Carrillo High School and the Armory Apartments. In 1998, Sister returned to Fond du Lac where she lived at the Boyle Apostolic Center and the CSA motherhouse while volunteering at Marian College and giving over 1500 hours of service to the CSA Office of Justice, Peace, and Ecology.

In July of 2003, Sister Mary Ellen joined the community of sisters residing at Nazareth Court and Center in Fond du Lac. There she continued to spread her light and share her Irish wit while visiting the sick, assisting with daily tasks, baking Irish soda bread, and engaging in community prayer and activities. Declining health necessitated her move to St. Francis Home in 2021. There she received loving care until the time of her death. The blessing "God love you" was often her final word to a visitor or caretaker who was leaving her room.

Preceding Sister Mary Ellen in death were her parents, her brothers Joseph, Edward, Eugene, Michael, Vincent, and John; her sisters Mary Elizabeth, Sister Mary Eugene, OSM, Kathleen, Eileen and Agnes.

Sister is survived by her brothers, James (Mary Margaret) Johnston, and Owen Johnston, her sister, Joan (John) Casey, several nieces and nephews and their families, and the Sisters of St. Agnes, with whom she lived, prayed, and ministered.

Visitation will be held on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. at Nazareth Court and Center, 375 Gillett Street, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

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A Prayer Service will be held at 11:00 a.m. in the Nazareth Center Chapel.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be offered for Sister Mary Ellen at 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, at St. Francis Home Chapel, 33 Everett Street, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, with Father Thomas Zelinski, OFM, Cap., presiding. Burial will follow at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Memorials may be directed to the CSA Mission Advancement Office, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac, WI 54937.

The Sisters of St. Agnes and the Johnston family are grateful to the nurses and staff of Nazareth Court and Center, St. Francis Home, and Hospice Hope for their devoted care of Sister Mary Ellen.

Zacherl Funeral Home is serving the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes.