

Sister Francesca Garvey, SSC

Sister Francesca Garvey, A Missionary Sister of St. Columban, died on Sunday, March 12, 2017 at St. Columban's-on-the-Lake Retirement Home in Silver Creek, NY. Born Rita Mary Garvey in Parkersburg, West Virginia, in 1924, she was the daughter of Mary Agnes McCallum Garvey and Patrick Joseph Garvey, from Galway, Ireland. Sister Francesca, fondly known as Sister Fran, graduated from St. Francis de Sales High School and worked for several years in the office of her family's business. When she responded to the call to commit her life to God and to the service of others, she chose the Irish missionary order of Columban Sisters, and became the first Postulant in the newly established novitiate in Silver Creek in 1946. The American novitiate was moved to Boston, Massachusetts in 1948 and Sister Fran professed her vows there the following year, the first American Sister to do so in the US.

When she arrived in Silver Creek, she was further from home than she had ever been. She had corresponded with a Columban Sister and seen a brochure, but she hadn't met a Sister in person and didn't even know what the habit looked like. Later, her picture would appear in a brochure for the Columban Sisters, and her smiling face inspired at least one Sister for sure, Sister Theresa Malloy, to join the Congregation.

One of her first assignments was to type the memoirs of a Columban Father, John Heneghan, a deeply spiritual man who had been killed by the Japanese in Manila, Philippines in 1945. In the process, she imbibed much of his missionary spirituality.

Sister Fran served as the Superior of the Columban house in Boston, and eventually as the Regional Superior for the United States, which included facilitating the beginnings of missions in Peru. When the Columban Sisters committed to a new mission in the US, in 1968, they acquired the seminary building and property of the Columban Fathers in Silver Creek. With great vision, enthusiasm, and tenacity, Sister Fran supervised the conversion of the building into a retirement home for elderly women and men, which opened in 1970. Over the next dozen years, Sister Fran traveled extensively to visit Columban Missions around the United States, and in the countries of Hong Kong, the Philippines, Korea, Chile and Peru.

Though she belonged to a missionary order, Sister Fran was never assigned to a mission overseas; instead she worked to support the Columbans and proved to be a very capable administrator and fundraiser from the American offices in Boston, Chicago, and Silver Creek. In 1984 she returned to Silver Creek as the Assistant Administrator of the Retirement Home. Those Sisters who did spend their lives abroad describe Fran's missionary zeal, her deep faith, and her constant, tireless efforts to support them, as absolutely essential to their wellbeing and the successes they witnessed.

Sr. Fran was a woman of great integrity, wisdom and total dedication to her roles in life and always so generous and personable. She reached her senior years with grace and humility, having dedicated her life to God and the service of others. She was preceded in death by her parents and her brothers James, Thomas, and Robert Garvey, and by her sister Agnes Culhane; she is survived by many nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, who loved her dearly and who remained close to their "Aunt Rita" over the years.

Sister Fran is remembered for her love of people, the poor having a special place in her heart. Nature and animals were also precious to her, especially birds, and the K9 "Buddies and Baxters" who lived at the retirement home in Silver Creek over the years. Her memory will be treasured by the Columban Sisters, her family, and friends around the world. Friends may call at the Chapel of St. Columban's on the Lake, on Friday March 17, from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. concluding with a prayer service. A Mass of Christian Burial will be concelebrated by Columban Fathers Peter Cronin, Vincent McCarthy, and Thomas Walsh on Saturday, March 18, at 9:30 a.m. in the chapel.

Motto: I live, not I, but Christ lives in me.