Sister Eleanor Horneman, OSF
Professed 1949

“Faith is not for overcoming obstacles; it is for experiencing them—all the way through!”
Richard Rohr

Throughout her 75 years as a professed sister of St. Francis, Sister Eleanor Horneman (formerly Sister John Magdalen) gave deep and joyful witness to God and all of Creation. Her long life beautifully realized her desire “to focus on the big picture and the hand of God in the evolutionary process.” Sister Eleanor’s wisdom, spiritual depth, reflectiveness, and loving personality were gifts to all who knew her.

Sister Eleanor, who died on Thursday, March 14, 2024, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, where she lived with her parents, Emil and B. Gunkel, and her five brothers and sisters. She was a member of St. Michael Parish and a student at Seton High School. Sister Eleanor earned a BA in English from Villanova University and a MA in English from Gonzaga University. She entered the congregation in 1944 and professed her first vows in 1949. Reflecting recently on her life as a sister of St. Francis, Sister Eleanor wrote, “By belonging to the Sisters of St. Francis I have had the opportunity to grow in my understanding of my faith and its practice. I have been exposed to and influenced by great women of faith who gave me courage in difficult times by their loving witness.”

Sister Eleanor began her years as a sister in education teaching in Trenton, New Jersey; Tacoma, Washington; and Klamath Falls, Oregon. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Sister Eleanor ministered for 34 years beginning by teaching at Towson Catholic High School. For many years she served as a coordinator of the Western Region Planning Project and as the archdiocesan chairwoman of Renew the Vision for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. She also volunteered at St. Anthony Shrine. When she left the archdiocesan office in Baltimore, Bishop Malooly noted, “Sister Eleanor was instrumental in leading the clergy and laity of the area to plan for the change that was needed. She and Sister Marietta Culhane served as “role models, women of faith, pioneers, and co-laborers in the Lord’s vineyard.” In 1996 Sister Eleanor received the Papal Medal, Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice, for her work in the archdiocese as well as the Father John McElroy Medal for her commitment to the Church and Catholic Schools in 2010. One Maryland parishioner said, “You sisters did not consider yourselves a step above us, but you worked with us… know that your years here have impacted our area tremendously.” Sister Marietta Culhane smiles and laughs when she remembers her friend of 65 years, stating, “Eleanor was so eloquent and concise. She always knew just the right way to say something, and I always had too much to say. When we were in a meeting and I began to ramble, she would simply clear her throat to give me a sign to stop, and she would take over and say all I was trying to say in one brilliant sentence. It was our own personal language. We worked so well together.”

Sister Eleanor served in congregational administration for eight years as provincial at St. Anthony Convent in Baltimore and in congregational leadership for four years at Our Lady of Angels Convent in Aston. She also served as the chair of human resources at Neumann University and as a volunteer at Assisi House. When writing about her ministry, Sister Eleanor said, “I have been challenged to take on and fulfill varied responsibilities that I would not have thought possible. Because of the nature of my work, I have seen many places and witnessed a gamut of human struggle, courage, and hope.” Sister Kathy Dougherty said, “Eleanor was a person of great wisdom and vision, creative and forward thinking. She always saw the positive possibilities in bringing our Franciscan charism to a contemporary setting. She was sensitive to the needs of those who are economically poor and marginalized, and she spent hours writing letters to people in power arguing for justice. As a leader within the congregation, she has impacted and enriched our lives immensely.”

In her free time, Sister Eleanor enjoyed reading, knitting, and listening to music. Throughout her long and meaningful life, Sister Eleanor lived her faith and Franciscan charism with joy, with deep conviction and sincerity, and with an abiding devotion to others. Her life will continue to remain a treasured blessing for the world. Sister Marietta agrees, “I’m not sad at the loss of my friend because I know she is where Eternal Love is real.”

All services will be held in Assisi House on Friday, March 22, and will be livestreamed. A Christian Wake Service will be held at 9:30 A.M. Mass of Christian Burial will be at 11 A.M. Burial will be in Our Lady of Angels Cemetery.