



Sister Frances Acton, OSF

Professed 1955



Sr. Fran — also known as “Aunt Kate” to her family — was unassuming by nature, deeply prayerful, quick-witted, creative, and always ready for an adventure. Born Frances Teresa in Wilmington, Delaware, she was the sixth of ten children (and one of 9 girls) born to William Joseph and Regina Eleanor Acton and grew up in Holy Rosary Parish in Claymont. Family was at the center of Sr. Fran’s life from the beginning and remained so throughout her 96 years. An athlete from a young age, she was a Junior Olympic gold medalist in tennis as a teenager. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1953 and professed her first vows in 1955.

Sr. Fran’s 71 years as a Sister of St. Francis took her into classrooms, parishes, pastoral ministry, and congregational service. She spent many years teaching elementary and high school students before moving into parish and faith development work, serving communities in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Kentucky. Later, she worked in the congregation’s Finance Office and volunteered in the Charism Office. Whatever the ministry, Sr. Fran brought with her a simple spirituality, a willingness to serve, and the ability to find joy in the people around her.

Sr. Fran never lost the athlete or adventurer within her. She played tennis throughout her life and, in her early 80s, joined a tennis group and took up the sport with vigor again. Red Hill Farm manager Margaret Lilley recalls being beckoned into many a lively game of handball with Sr. Fran — and frequently finding herself on the losing end! Sr. Fran was happiest outdoors, whether swimming, camping, traveling, or simply surrounded by creation. For decades, she traveled with a small camper in tow, often camping in state parks. She also shared many joyful adventures with her dear friend Sr. Marcella Francis, including a cross-country train trip and summers at Camp Brisson in northeast Maryland, where Sr. Fran ran the boats and took girls swimming.

Creative and good with her hands, Sr. Fran was especially proud of being a skilled woodworker. She loved animals, including her beloved golden retriever, and kept numerous bird feeders — often requesting birdseed instead of birthday presents. She wanted little for herself, kept few possessions, and hoped to be remembered as “very unassuming.” Yet Sr. Fran loved a good practical joke, and her wit remained with her throughout her life. One friend summed her up as “a wonderful sister, teacher, carpenter, athlete — all with the best sense of humor.”

Sr. Fran’s playfulness existed alongside a remarkably deep prayer life. Her longtime friend Sr. Eileen Doherty called her “one of the most prayerful people I’ve ever known,” saying that if you couldn’t find Sr. Fran, she was probably either outside or in the chapel praying. Another sister remembered her “simple spirituality” and the way she “really did see God in everyone she met.”

And then there was Aunt Kate. Sr. Fran remained deeply connected to generations of nieces, nephews, and extended family. When she celebrated her 95th birthday and Jubilee, more than 100 family members gathered with her — a beautiful testament to how dearly she was loved. Reflecting on her life as a sister, Sr. Fran wrote, “I came to see everything as a gift. That notion freed me to live life one day at a time. I believed and trusted in Jesus, hence I rejoiced in the mercy, forgiveness, and love of God for me.”

Perhaps that is the simplest way to understand Sr. Fran. She saw life as gift — in family and friendship, prayer and laughter, adventure and quiet, and in the creation she loved so much. Rest now, dear sister, in the fullness of the mercy, forgiveness, and love in which you trusted so completely.

All services will be held at Assisi House on Thursday, October 1, 2026. A Christian Wake Service will be held at 9:30 A.M., followed by a viewing. Mass of Christian Burial will be at 11 A.M., and burial will be in Our Lady of Angels Cemetery.

The services will be livestreamed.

