

SISTER JOSEPHINE

OF JESUS

ST. LEGER



*BORN TO EARTHLY LIFE:
DECEMBER 3, 1931*

*BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE:
AUGUST 16, 2021*

Sister Josephine St. Leger
Province of U.S.A. & Canada
1931 - 2021

Josephine St. Leger was born in O’Callaghan’s Mills, County Clare, Ireland to Patrick and Mary Anne (Kelleher) St. Leger on December 3, 1931. Life began for little Josie in the lovely countryside. She was the youngest of five siblings, all of whom were educated at the local National School where faith and life were closely linked. While the distance from home to school was close to two miles, the daily trudge by country roads or through the fields were times of growth. Nature at the different seasons gave plenty of scope for learning. Friendships to last a lifetime were forged during these early years.

Secondary school was in the big city of Dublin, a culture shock in many ways, yet it proved beyond doubt the quality of education in the National Schools of Ireland. These years were busy and good ones and prepared Josephine for separation from home and family, and where she learned the value of maintaining friendships. This was her first real contact with sisters and she responded to the call that would help her live her gift of faith as a Cluny missionary. When Josephine's decision to enter the convent was known, it did cause some wondering by those who knew her at the hurling matches and at the ceili dances. The fact that she celebrated 67 years of religious profession in January, 2021 is the answer to these wonderings!

Josephine entered the Cluny Novitiate in Ferbane, Ireland in 1941, was received as a novice in 1942, and made profession of vows as a Cluny Sister in January, 1954. When Sister Josephine entered Cluny, she fully expected to be missioned to Africa, the South Pacific, or the Caribbean, as during her high school years she had sung “Go Ye Afar” with the Mt. Sackville choir in the ceremonies for the newly

professed sisters setting out for distant missions. She might well have been surprised to be missioned to the USA instead, but wherever she went, she set about announcing the Good News of God's all-embracing love, in the missionary spirit of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey.

Sister Josephine arrived in the United States in 1954. After a brief stay at Stella Maris Home on Washington Street, she was missioned to Torrance, CA. In 1958 she joined three other sisters in founding the first Cluny mission at St. Joseph Parish in Hamilton, Ontario. She next was assigned to Cluny School in Newport for the 1963-64 school year before returning to California where she spent many years teaching at Sts. Peter and Paul School in Wilmington.

In 1979 Sister Josephine came to Newport as principal of Cluny School, a position she held for twelve years. As principal, she encouraged the teachers to be creative and develop their own style rather than fit into a mold. She mentored and supported, leading, and commanding respect by her example. Of the most troublesome student, she would say, "Underneath it all, he (or she) is a good kid." When correcting a miscreant, she could add just the right note of humor and love. As one mischievous student, then a grown man said, "We always knew you loved us."

During her years at Cluny School, she also contributed to parish life at St. Augustin Church, Newport as religious education teacher, Confirmation coordinator, and Eucharistic Minister.

Belonging to the worldwide Cluny family, sharing the mission and relationships with the sisters was central to her life. Through her relationships in community, in her various ministries, in her love for the children, and her volunteer trips to Kentucky and West Virginia she had a gentle way of letting others know that they were loved and

valued. Sister Josephine devoted her gifts for leadership not only to her various ministries but also to her Cluny community, serving as community leader at St. Joseph Convent on Brenton Road and later, as the new community leader, gathering with three other sisters in the 2003 founding of Javouhey House, the Cluny Sisters Community on Carroll Avenue in Newport.

From 1995-2003 Sister also served as Provincial Councilor and Trustee of Cluny School. To be able to celebrate her golden jubilee, at St. Augustin Church on January 4, 2004 with Sisters Anne Grogan and Pius Moore the two members of her profession group, and surrounded by Cluny Sisters, family members, friends and parishioners was a peak moment for her.

Sister Josephine held degrees in English and Philosophy, and Education from the University of San Diego, and studied at Weston Theological Institute, Cambridge, Boston.

Proud of her American citizenship, Sister Josephine's love for Ireland and its culture never waned. Sister's involvement in The Irish Heritage Society was very much part of her life. Cluny School helped to bring in the Irish Month with their choir, walking in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, and singing for the Masses in honor of St. Patrick at St. Joseph Church to begin the Parade and at St. Augustin's Church on the feast itself. Sister Josephine served on the Board of Directors of the Irish Heritage Society for many years, and chaplain of the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians for seven years. She enjoyed the ceili dancing on every occasion. Who better to be the Grand Marshall of the Saint Patrick's Day Parade in the year 2000?

After leaving Cluny School, Sister Josephine began ministry as Pastoral Assistant in St. Augustin Parish. Sister Josephine encouraged many initiatives and knew how to draw out the gifts of parishioners

to serve in various capacities in the life of the parish. Sister trained children as altar servers, and the newly confirmed and adults in the liturgical ministries. She prepared couples for marriage and then for the baptism of their children. She accompanied the sick and homebound in their final illnesses, comforted grieving families, and helped them plan funerals. During those years, she also served as a trustee of the parish. All this she did unassumingly with love and devotion until her retirement November, 2019. After her retirement she continued to serve by conducting graveside services when requested, supporting the bereaved, staying in touch with parishioners, and including them in her ministry of daily prayer.

Down through the years, even in the midst of busy days of ministry and community responsibilities, Sister Josephine remained close to her family, celebrating the joys and supporting them through difficulties and loss.

Deep down, Sister Josephine was always the simple girl from O'Callaghan's Mills who could marvel at a daisy on her path and find joy in the little things. Although she will be remembered for her many accomplishments, she was more importantly a woman true to herself, her God, her family, her sisters in community, and the numerous friendships forged wherever she lived. There was always a twinkle in her eye, and a ready smile on her face. And when the music started, you'd hear a tapping toe. We will always be grateful for the gift of Sister Josephine among us. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dílis.*

As the years progressed, Sister Josephine's health began to decline. For many years, the loving heart that had served God and neighbor began to slow and to create significant health problems for her. Beginning in January of 2021, she found herself weaker and less able to be as involved as she had been. Yet, she never lost the "twinkle" and often her smile was her communication when she was too weak to use

words. In August of 2021, she became much weaker and needed to go into a nursing home where she could have 24 hour care. Her graciousness touched all who entered her room. On the night of August 16th alone and asleep, “she slipped the bonds of earth and saw the face of God.”

She is truly missed by all of us who had the grace of living and working with her.