

Classic Franciscan



Mary Hebert, SFO

All Things Mary

By Julia Pearson, SFO
Human Interest Editor

We care, God cures.

- Motto of the Stephen Ministry -

A well-worn phrase that shines through the prism of Franciscan light is: "We are God's hands in the world."

It can also be said that we put hands and feet on our prayers when we serve others for God. Mary Hebert, of Trenton, Michigan has been God's compassionate ears in her corner of the world for many years.

Born on August 15, 1918 in Chicago, Illinois, Nona "Mary" McLaughlin lived with her family in Ferndale, Michigan, where she attended St. James Grade School and was graduated with honors from St. James High School in 1936. She was involved with the youth groups at the Shrine of the Little Flower and at St. James Catholic Church until her marriage to Louis Hebert in January, 1946 at St. James Catholic Church. Mary was professed in the Secular Franciscan Order on October 5, 1945 at St. Bonaventure monastery in Detroit. Her family had its ups and downs, as it grew to include seven children: Francis, Mary, Anne, Carol, Joyce, Cynthia and William.

Mary's life was then visited by profound losses. Her children, Joyce and William, then adults facing what appeared to be overwhelming circumstances, ended their own lives. In the devastation of Joyce's death in May, 1974, her marriage ended divorce in 1975. Mary recalls a miracle that grabbed her attention, as she sat on the sofa of her living room. She heard a voice that she knew was God's: "You have two choices: you can live or you can die." With her God and her faith to sustain her in the depth of her pain, Mary chose life. William's death was another searing tide of grief in 1982.

Divorce and suicide had broken her heart, but a broken heart is also an open heart. In 1987, Mary traveled to Baltimore, Maryland to be trained as a Stephen Leader. As a Stephen Minister through her own parish, she was co-leader in a Survivors of Suicide group for five years. Mary quotes Deepak Chopra, "Everyone is doing the best they can to form their own level of consciousness." She relates, "I really believe this. It frees me to love people unconditionally."

For the last nineteen years, Mary has lived in the Trenton Co-Op Towers, where she serves as an un-official Stephen Minister to her neighbors as well as her extended family. Now in her 91st year, she gave up her car this past October. One of the residents in her building provides transportation for Mary and others. Mary says assuredly, "God takes care of us." Since she can't make it to daily Mass, Mary subscribes to Living with Christ: Your Daily Companion for Living and Praying the Eucharist. Father Lester Bach is a favorite author and Mary is re-reading his 1975 book, Take Time for Sunsets.

The story of Capuchin Franciscan, Fr. Solanus Casey, is especially dear to Mary. After his ordination in 1904, Fr. Solanus served in New York, Harlem, and Yonkers. Known as "the Doorkeeper" during twenty year as the porter at Mary's beloved monastery of St. Bonaventure in Detroit, Fr. Solanus greeted and served people of any age and walk in life. He was always ready to listen to anyone at any time. Fr. Solanus died on July 31, 1957, at the exact day and hour of his First Holy Mass 53 years before. On July 11, 1995, Pope John Paul II named Solanus Casey, as Venerable.