

Marge Stein, SFO

1924-2005

Past National Canonist and Parliamentarian

When the Saints Go Marching In...

By Anne Twitchell, SFO

She liked the San Diego Padres, the New York Yankees, the opera, New Orleans jazz, and the idea that we Franciscans were all headed in the same direction – following in the footsteps of St. Francis. Marguerite Blackwell Stein, known to most of us as Marge was, as everyone one who knew her said, “a good friend” or “Marge helped me,” or both. When I met Marge, in 1980, she was working in the County Counsel’s office in Napa, California, had recently been professed, and was busily founding a new fraternity in Napa. Marge, then, became affiliated with the Milwaukee-based School Sisters of St. Francis earning a master’s degree in theology in Hales Corners, Wisconsin. She left the convent to study canon law at St. Paul Pontifical University in Ottawa, Ontario and, in 1990, earned a second master’s degree and went on to serve the National Fraternity, helping write the National Statutes. In 1994, she moved to San Diego working as a judge for the Diocesan Tribunal; returning to Northern California, she continued that work, this time for the Santa Rosa Diocese.

In 1997, Marge was nominated for the office of Regional Formation Director, but, to her amazement, was elected Minister of Blessed Junipero Serra Region (BJSR) where she not only served as Minister, but, again, became a founding member of another fraternity - this time in Santa Rosa. In her spare time, she took the Life-Giving Union course and, on February 18, 2000, was certified as a Lay Spiritual Assistant.

After Marge suffered a second heart attack in 2002, she moved to San Diego to be near a daughter. True to form, Marge did not stop working or serving her fellow Franciscan sisters and brothers in whatever way she could. In 2003, Marge was elected Vice Minister of Immaculate Conception Fraternity, St. Francis Region, and took on the Commission for Peace and Justice in that fraternity.



In 2003, Marge was elected Vice Minister of Immaculate Conception Fraternity, St. Francis Region, and took on the Commission for Peace and Justice in that fraternity. She also served as president of the residents’ council at Villa Bonita, where she last resided.

Marge attended every NAFRA meeting from 1986 through 2003, every Quinquennial from 1981, and every Western Week of Community held during the past 22 years. As Regional Minister of BJSR, Marge hosted NAFRA at San Damiano Retreat Center, Danville, California and a Western Week of Community at San Juan Bautista, California.

I last saw Marge in May 2005, in Oakland, when we met for lunch. Marge was attending the wedding of one of her daughters and while we were meeting as friends, I took along my yellow legal pad – she had taught me well – and, as true Franciscans, our lunch served our brothers and sisters as she gave me sound legal advice that I followed.

Just a few notes about Marge’s journey before she became a Secular Franciscan. Marge was born in Evanston, IL October 1924 and graduated from Cathedral High School, New York, at the age of 16. In 1946, after attending Hunter College, a business school, she enlisted in the US Navy and earned certification as a Pitman shorthand reporter, a skill she used at Courts Martial Boards. After World War II, Marge was given an early discharge to work as a civilian for the Department of the Army at the War Crimes Tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany.

A court reporter by day, supporting her five children after her divorce, Marge decided she wanted to “be a lawyer, because she thought she was a lot smarter than some of the lawyers she saw,” went to night school, and, in 1966, was the lone woman among 15 graduates of the initial class of 47 at University of San Diego law school. At the time, her five children ranged in ages from 9 to 16.

Marge is survived by her three daughters, two sons, and nine grandchildren. She is missed already by many Secular Franciscans.

