

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Mary Anne Schiller

BORN: January 1927

ENTERED CONGREGATION: February 12, 1948

DIED: December 23, 2021

Sister Mary Anne Schiller once told a reporter for *The Sunday Home News*, published in New Brunswick, New Jersey, that she just wanted to “share my love of joy and life.” This was her answer when asked why she gave up a week’s vacation while a student at Fordham University to lend her artistic talents to a remodeling project at St. Cecilia’s Church in New Jersey. To share her love of joy and life was who Mary Anne was, wherever she went, whether it was in a classroom or as a missionary, as a community outreach minister, in retirement at Salem Heights and especially as a resident of Emma Hall.

Sister Mary Anne was born in Coronado, California, in January 1927. She was the youngest of three daughters born to Helen Evans Schiller and Edgar Palmer Schiller. Coronado is a resort town where Mary Anne spent her young childhood playing on the beach. Unfortunately, her father died when she was five.

Mary Anne’s parents were Protestant and they gave her the name Mary. Her mother taught her to recite the 91st and the 23rd Psalms as her night prayer. Later, when Mary lived in San Diego with her mother and her sisters, her mother learned about the San Luis Rey Academy. After Mary was taken for a visit, she said, “I fell in love with the place and with those strange but kind Sisters all dressed in black. That did it! In September I became an eighth-grade student at the academy.” After a retreat in her freshman year where, Mary said, “God had gotten some kind of hold on

me,” she formally began learning the Catholic faith.

On one weekend, from March 6 thru 8, 1942, Mary was baptized, made her first confession, received her First Communion and was confirmed with the name Anne. After that weekend she said she wanted to sign up immediately to become a Sister but was advised to wait until she finished high school.

In February 1948 Mary Anne, along with several other girls from the Academy, embarked on a long train ride to Dayton, Ohio, thus entering the Congregation to become Sisters of the Precious Blood. On investment day she received the name of Sister Mary Carmela. She professed her final vows in 1953. Later, she would change her name from Sister Mary Carmela to Sister Mary Anne.

She then spent 30 plus years teaching small children, first in Missouri and Ohio, then Colorado and California. She said, “I truly loved teaching no matter where I was sent. I thank the Lord for all the children He has given me to teach. Those were 30 years of many blessings.”

After her teaching years, Mary Anne embarked on a new journey as that of a missionary in Chile. She writes, “I learned to speak Spanish while ministering to the people of ... Chile. They were very patient with me, and soon I was speaking the beautiful Spanish language. I thank God for all the Chilean people I have known, and for allowing me to experience their beautiful country.”

Upon her return to the U.S., Mary Anne

ministered as a paralegal translator for the Center for Migratory Affairs in San Diego. She served refugees fleeing from El Salvador and Guatemala who were seeking political asylum in the U.S. She writes, “I am grateful that my ability to speak Spanish was of service to them at that crucial time.”

She then relocated to St. Agnes Church in Los Angeles and served as director of a parish outreach ministry to about 800 families who, as she said, “cross(ed) the boundaries of faith and ethnicity.” Mary Anne again expressed her gratitude for this ministry, calling it a “privilege ... to shed a bit of light for those who found themselves in stormy waters. Many times,” she says, “I am the one who found God in the person of the stranger and so I was the one ministered to.”

Once Mary Anne retired to Salem, she said she still sang her song of gratitude to God as she tried to be a life-giving, reconciling presence. Even at Emma, Mary Anne shared her love and joy for all. While she was grateful for the staff at Maria Joe, they were grateful for her. Mary Anne’s whole life is best summed up by a prayer that she received on the day of her first Eucharist. “Lord, no prayer can tell You all I feel, no thanks sufficient be. Lord, let my whole life be a song of gratitude to Thee.”

Mary Anne, your whole life was a song of gratitude and we, your Sisters, know how you lived it here with us and how you continue to live it in eternity with your Beloved. Amen.

— Sister Marla Gipson