

## IN MEMORIAM



# Sister Eleanor McNally

(Sister Mary Thomas)

BORN: December 1918

ENTERED CONGREGATION: June 29, 1933

DIED: August 29, 2022

In December 1918 — exactly three weeks after the signing of the Armistice officially ending the First World War — Blanche Agnes Willis gave birth to her first child and only daughter at the family home on Vine Street in Hollywood, California. Her husband, Thomas Lee McNally, standing close by, was there to welcome little Eleanor Cecelia to the world. Thirteen days later, on Sunday, December 15, the proud parents presented their firstborn for Baptism at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament on Sunset Boulevard in North Hollywood. The family would not be complete until the additions of Thomas (Mack), John (Johnny) and Joseph (Joe).

With the stock market crash and the Depression of 1927, the McNallys left Los Angeles and made the “three-day journey” to their new home in Phoenix, where Ellie’s father found work. It was in Phoenix that Eleanor, at age 10, first met the Sisters of the Precious Blood at St. Mary’s School. According to Ellie, she “liked what she saw,” and by the end of the eighth grade, she decided to become a Sister, and at age 14, she left her “family to make the 2,000-mile trip to Ohio.”

Ellie was given the name Sister Mary Thomas and began her teaching career at Sts. Peter and Paul School in Norwood, Ohio. She stated that in

the first year, she “got battered” by seventh graders. However, the next school year, she “retired to sweet sixth graders.” World War II brought sadness and gloom to the world. By that time, Sister Mary Thomas had three wonderful years as a teacher at Regina High School in Norwood, and with peace being restored, life brightened up again.

From Cincinnati, Sister Ellie made her way to Ottawa and Fort Recovery, Ohio, where she was principal while teaching a sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade classroom. She enjoyed her time in Ohio. However, “western skies, majestic mountains and the blue Pacific” were calling her back to her roots. In 1951, her dream came true as she returned to the west at St. Mary’s in Phoenix, her old elementary school. From there, she went to St. Mary’s High School, where her teaching years would culminate after she taught English for four years.

In 1960, Sister Ellie was elected to the general Council of the Congregation. In the middle of her term came the election of Pope John XXIII in Rome, who “opened the windows and just about blew everybody away.” Life in the Church was turned upside down, as was religious life. Sister Ellie found herself in congregational leadership during the changing and challenging years from 1966 to 1971. During that

turbulent time, she “would sit on the beach in Oceanside and let the majestic blue vastness of the Pacific wash over her with its gift of peace.”

The next chapter of Ellie’s life would be in Southern California, working with the Sisters’ Senate for five years and 18 years in parish ministry to adults, seniors, the sick, RCIA and Renew. In retirement, she continued volunteering as a teacher, ministering to the needy and visiting the imprisoned.

In 1933, a newspaper article ended by wishing Ellie “well as she enters the sisterhood to devote her life to forward the Work of God.” She wrote, “If I’ve done that the past 75 years, I owe it first to the wonderful inspiration of my mom and dad, to the example of those wonderful teachers at St. Mary’s, and the love and care through the years of many Sisters and friends. Through them all, God’s arms have enfolded me. ...”

After 70 years, Ellie wrote: “Thanks is all I can answer as I walk with God’s hand in mine to a place called happily ever after.”

Ellie, we say “thanks!” for taking God’s hand and walking with us, your CPPS Sisters, in answering the call to serve God’s people.

— Sister Patty Kremer