

MARY E. SCHELLINGS, R.S.C.J.
1924-1996

On December 1, the first Sunday of Advent, at 10:30 PM, Mary Schellings peacefully went to the Lord she so longed for. She had been at home, at her request, for nine days, lovingly cared for by Eve Kavanagh, Helen O'Regan, and her family and community. Mary was alert until almost the end, receiving with a smile of welcome the many visitors who came to say good-bye. Almost every evening Mass was celebrated at her bedside in the community room. many members of the Area shared in those final Eucharists.

Mary was born in Ausable Falls, N.Y. on March 5, 1924, the youngest of the six children of John Arnold Schellings and Winona Voullaire Schellings. The family subsequently moved to New York City. As she once noted, her family life was marked by many losses. She lost her mother when she was eight, her oldest brother when she was fifteen, her father when she was twenty-seven, and two brothers within three years of each other when she was in her forties. Her eldest sister died in 1976. Mary struggled with ill health all her life. At age thirteen, she experienced her first serious illness, rheumatic fever, which isolated her from her family for some time. In her forties she was diagnosed with a light case of MS, an illness which her surviving sister, Winona Farrell, has struggled bravely with for many years. Her long encounter with pain brought to Mary a special gift of compassion for the sick whom she lovingly served during the last years of her life in her role as Hospital Chaplain at Lenox Hill Hospital.

Mary graduated from Manhattanville College with a BA in Music in 1946. With a Masters from Manhattanville in 1948, she obtained a Masters in Library Science with Honors from Columbia University in 1962. In 1979, she was granted a Masters in Systematic Theology from the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, CA. She entered the Society of the Sacred Heart at Kenwood in 1946, and taught at Greenwich, Grosse Point, and Rochester before serving in Rome from 1970 to 1976 as Communications Coordinator for the society. Upon her return to the States she served for nine years as a university chaplain, first at Princeton University and then at the Catholic Center at New York University. In 1990, at the age of sixty-six, Mary began preparing for a new ministry as a Hospital chaplain, studying with seminarians of various faiths, most of whom were in their twenties. She settled in as a student with them, sharing her wealth of life experience. She became an accredited member of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains and began volunteering at Lenox Hill Hospital in 1991, where she was greatly admired by patients and staff for her compassionate ministry to pre-operative patients of all religious faiths and those who were seriously ill. In 1994, at Lenox Hill Hospital, Mary established the volunteer Roman Catholic Eucharistic Ministry program by bringing in and training lay volunteers to support the efforts of the hospital's Pastoral Care and Education Department, and the neighboring parish, St. Jean Baptiste.

Since her death, eloquent tributes have poured in from the many who were touched by her unselfish life of service to others.

One of her supervisors in the C.P.E. Program wrote of Mary, “She has a heart for the suffering people, and as she integrates her own suffering into the fabric of her life, she has the resources to touch their lives.”

Mary bore her last illness with the same strength that had enabled her to live such an active, dedicated life. During the last weeks of her life the Lord she so generously served visited her with a radiant peace that she shared with all those who had the grace to be near her. The request of one of her favorite prayers, which she had printed in her 1994 Christmas card, was truly granted:

O Keeper of Promises,
composer of grace,
grant me
glee in my blood,
prayer in my heart,
trust in my core,
songs for my journey,
and a sense of your kingdom.