



The Companion

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www.emmauserie.org



REMEMBERING SISTER MARY (1942-2023)

From Sister Val ...

Dear Friends,

This certainly was not the first “Letter from the Director” I had in mind. I had expected to write about Sister Mary stepping back from her role as Director of Emmaus after more than four decades of faithful service, enjoying more time golfing and gardening, while continuing to serve at her beloved soup kitchen and to interact with the community who loved her as much as she loved them.

I had also expected to write about how humbled and honored I am to be the next director of Emmaus. Those feelings were amplified when Sister Mary died unexpectedly on May 14 and I experienced the outpouring of love and gratitude, sadness and grief, expressed by hundreds of people at her funeral a few weeks ago. It was overwhelming, but not surprising. Who didn’t love Sister Mary Miller? In fact, the first person who called to offer her condolences the day after her death was a guest whom Sister Mary had had to ban from the soup kitchen after an unsafe incident a year ago.

Like our guests and so many others, I experienced the profound impact that Sister Mary had on people. I came to Emmaus Ministries nearly four years ago, and Sister Mary loved to point out that it was a full-circle moment: I was born in a small town in eastern Pennsylvania, south of Allentown: Emmaus. And now this calling to Emmaus Ministries, to working with Sister Mary, has become another home for me.

This extraordinary woman—with whom I have worked alongside—has shown me, taught me, and modeled for me the Gospel of Jesus. She made Scripture verses of mercy and justice come alive, embodied in her very being.

Her death makes one of Sister Mary’s favorite Scripture verses even more relevant. In the Acts of the Apostles, after Jesus’s death and resurrection, the apostles are put in prison for teaching the people and spreading the good news of Christ. The apostles are led out of jail by an angel, and when the court officers begin to question them, a respected elder named Gamaliel warns those trying to put an end to the apostles’ work. He says, “If it is of God, you will not be able to stop it.”

Without doubt, the ministry at Emmaus is of God. Without doubt, Sister Mary left us a holy legacy to follow. Without doubt, her passion and commitment will inspire us and instruct us as we move forward—with hands that will not stop the work she began and hearts full of gratitude for the gift of knowing Sister Mary Miller.

I am grateful to continue this gospel journey with all of you. I am grateful to call Emmaus home.



Sister Mary with Sister Valerie Luckey,
Director of Emmaus

In peace,
Sister Val

Sister Mary: A Model of Love

Reflection by Emmaus Staff Writer Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB

Scripture promises, “Perfect love casts out fear.” To know Sister Mary Miller was to see that verse proven.

Small-of-stature, sensitive, and dignified, with a background in teaching in Catholic grade schools, Sister Mary was not an obvious choice to serve as Director of Emmaus Ministries. When she was appointed to the role in 1981, another sister predicted that Sister Mary would quit within two weeks, expecting that the roughness, suffering, and ugliness of poverty would be too much for her to take.

Instead, Sister Mary led Emmaus for over 42 years, meeting thousands of guests with the same open heart and warm presence that had made her such a beloved teacher and principal. When dinners were interrupted by any kind of crisis, Sister Mary was right there, calm, confident, and reassuring. Drug overdoses, mental health episodes, physical wounds that needed attention, arguments and grudges: guests brought them to the kitchen, and Sister Mary tended to them all, undaunted and unshaken. Her strong, loving gaze could steady even the most vulnerable, panicked, or enraged people. If she was afraid in those moments, she showed no sign of it.

Sister Mary’s pure and unfeigned love was especially clear when, in 2015, the soup kitchen burned in a fire set by a mentally ill guest. Just days afterward, Sister Mary told reporters, “We want everyone to know that the man who did this is a member of our family. We shouldn’t judge him.” She went on to testify for him to receive a lighter sentence. Forgiveness and compassion had the final word.

Sister Mary knew God’s love and knew how to share it with others. The hungry and the helpless, the rejected and the forgotten, the abandoned and the abused, all found a home at Emmaus and in her heart. So did innumerable volunteers, benefactors, and friends. And that love that she offered to the world goes on in the network of lives she touched. The love that flowed through Sister Mary continues to strengthen and give courage to all who felt it. Inspired by her example, that love will be alive at Emmaus Ministries for many years to come.



To read Sister Mary’s obituary, visit:

<https://eriebenedictines.org/story/memorial-sister-mary-miller-osb>

The Emmaus Family Reflects on Sister Mary

Sister Mary Miller wrote a list called 10 Things I Know about her experiences with those she served. Emmaus Staff Writer Liz Allen asked volunteers, guests, staff, and friends to reflect on the list Sister Mary created after decades of work at Emmaus.

1. It is vital to have flowers on the tables, curtains on the windows and good art on the walls.

“Sister Mary made it so that all this happens in a setting that feels like a home. The soup kitchen is decorated all year long, not only at holidays. She would explain to the guests why the artwork here shows people on the road to Emmaus, in all kinds of circumstances and eras.” —Kathé Wilson, who has volunteered at the soup kitchen on Tuesdays for 30 years

2. There is a fine line between one side of the counter and the other. If there were addictions, divorce, mental health issues or abuse in my childhood, the situations could very easily be reversed.

“I’ve worked as a cook, done landscaping, roofing, construction and worked at a gas station. I want to work. I was homeless for three years, then I got an apartment, but the rent kept going up and I got evicted. But Sister Mary always welcomed people and made sure that we had good food to eat. I don’t know where the guys would get a good meal without the soup kitchen. Without this place, without Sister Mary, I wouldn’t know where to go.”

—Ricky Felton, soup kitchen guest

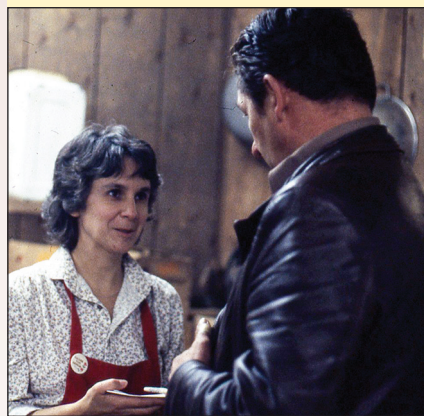


Sister Mary, always ready to listen

3. Everyone coming through our doors had the same hopes and dreams as I did, or even now, the same needs and desires.

“I am a retired community nurse. I worked on the street. I still help out where needed, taking people for rides, for example. When you greet people and treat them with the dignity they deserve and should be getting everywhere, that is love. The way Sister Mary smiled, the personal touch she offered, that is the Gospel.”

—Mary Louise Imbruglio, volunteer



The Emmaus Family Reflects on Sister Mary



Sister Mary with volunteer Tony Pol

4. Personal contact and interaction is as important as the food we offer.

"When I retired I told my wife's sister, Kitty Welton, who volunteers with her husband, Harvey, that if they ever needed help, I could fill in. Kitty introduced me to Sister Mary. I told her, 'I'm filling in,' and Sister said, 'You're full-time now.' She wouldn't accept 'no' from anyone."

—Tony Pol, the former Erie Fire Chief who responded to the fire at the soup kitchen in 2015, now serves meals with his wife Chris and the Weltons

5. There is both beauty and goodness in each individual—for some, it just takes a bit more time to see it (be it because of our prejudices or their defenses).

"Our family has observed Sister Mary's patience and kindness, and it rubs off on you as volunteers. She would treat the guests as you would want to be treated. At Emmaus, it's much more than 'Here's a meal.' She'd sit down and talk with the guests. She's probably as close to a saint as anyone I know." —Dave Holland, who began volunteering in the 1970s with his parents, Mary and Earl Holland

6. I am often "put to shame" by the kindness, compassion, humility, appreciation and prayerfulness of our guests.

"Sister Mary implanted in our hearts that you reach a higher level of compassion from getting to know our guests. So many guests say, 'God bless you all for being here, for serving this meal.' They don't have to be grateful; they deserve food. But they are so gracious and appreciative. It makes us remember we are all human and sometimes we need a little help." —Catherine Simon, Emmaus Soup Kitchen and Food Pantry Coordinator, who began volunteering with her family at age 8

7. Life can be very bleak and unfair, especially to children.

"Sister Mary was teaching us that we need to give the guests hope and see them as the beautiful human beings they are. She never looked at guests and saw the darkness in their lives. She always saw the light in people, the life in people, the hope in people." —Darlene Feeney, retired Erie School District teacher who volunteers with her husband Jim

Right: Sister Mary with a child at the Kids Cafe

The Emmaus Family Reflects on Sister Mary



8. That soup kitchens should not exist in this country of plenty.

"Sister Mary was the director when we opened the food pantry in 1983. It started when a man rang the doorbell on East 9th Street, where we were living. He could have been my brother. He said, 'I lost my job, I have a family to feed.' We packed up a box of food. The need always manifested itself to us and we responded." —Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, first director of Emmaus Soup Kitchen

9. That the Soup Kitchen must exist in this country of greed and militarism.

"The needs I try to meet for women are help with rent, utilities, and whatever other cries of the poor I hear. When our country's leaders push policies that cut spending for human services, and reward those who are already well off, the cries of the poor grow louder. We need to answer those cries. Sister Mary was never afraid to articulate that the misplaced priorities of this country have a direct impact on the lives of those most in need, especially women and children."

—Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, Emmaus Women's Advocate



Sister Mary and Sister Rosanne (center) with

10. Emmaus Ministries is gospel work. Sisters Claire Marie (left) and Lucia Surnik (right), longtime staff members

"Christ said, 'Wherever two or more of you are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of you.' Sister Mary believed that. She believed that whenever we



were at Emmaus, we were gathered in the name of Jesus. She became Christ for others, and she revered everyone as Christ in our midst. Because of the community she created, I have no doubt our staff, volunteers, and supporters will continue to gather and strive to be the face of Christ for the poor." —Sister Valerie Luckey, Director of Emmaus

For the Record: Dates to Remember

ERIE GIVES 2023:

August 8

www.eriegives.org



Support Emmaus Ministries through the annual one-day giving event for Erie nonprofits. For more information, visit the Erie Gives website.

CROP WALK 2023:

September 24

Presque Isle State Park

Join the Emmaus Walking Team!
For more information,
contact the office at 814-459-8754.



We Give Thanks: A Note of Gratitude

In addition to the support and kindness we receive each day at Emmaus, we cannot begin to list all the reasons we are grateful during this time of loss. Of course, there are the regular donations of food, supplies, items for our Kids Cafe, and other contributions toward our work, but the outpouring of cards, phone calls, flowers, and above all, love and care, after the death of Sister Mary has strengthened the entire Emmaus staff. You give us reason to rejoice even while we grieve together. From all of us at Emmaus, from the bottom of our hearts, "Thank you"!

Emmaus Ministries Remembers

We are grateful to family members who asked that memorials be made to Emmaus in the names of their deceased loved ones:

Ann Marie Lynch Bach
James G. Biebel
Hyun "Kim" Soon (Yu) Erdely
James Kern
John (Jack) W. Greene Sr.

Dr. James W. Nutter
Kathie Anne Rothrock
James F. Sexauer
Richard A. Tullio
Dorothy Zewe

We also remember Emmaus volunteers who have passed away:

Raymond D. Bretz
Marlene A. "Jackie" Ennis
Douglas H. Green

Leonard Phil Sly
Mary Dolores (Marydee) Weir

Sister Mary Through the Years



Top to bottom: Sister Mary (center) in her early days of religious life; Sister Mary began serving at the soup kitchen before being appointed director in 1981; Mission trips to Haiti were an important part of Sister Mary's spirituality of service. (Seen here with her friend Sister Mary Lou Kownacki); Sister Mary continued faithfully serving at the soup kitchen every week through April 2023; Sister Mary with the Emmaus staff in 2021.

Food for the Soul

A PRAYER FROM ST. VINCENT DE PAUL (ADAPTED)

You will find that charity
is a heavy burden to carry,
heavier than the kettle of soup
and the basket of bread.

But you must your gentleness
and your smile keep.

Giving soup and bread
isn't all that you can do.

The poor are your masters—
terribly sensitive and exacting
as you will see.

But the more demanding they seem
the more unjust and bitter
the more you must give them your love.

It is only because of your love,
only your love,
that the poor will forgive you
the bread you give them.

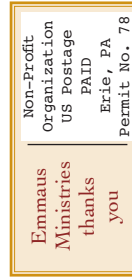
(This prayer was a favorite of Sister Mary's.)



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Companion Staff: Valerie Luckey, OSB; Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB; Liz Allen

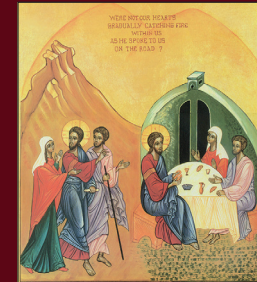


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Icon *Road to Emmaus*
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Marie-Paul, OSB
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They came
to know Christ
in the breaking
of the bread.

Luke 24:35