



Mary Bryan, SHCJ

Teacher, Society Leadership Team Member, American Province Leader,
Religious Formator, Retreat and Spiritual Director
October 3, 1929 – January 12, 2021

Rosemont, Pennsylvania – Mary Bryan, SHCJ, a Sister of the Holy Child Jesus for 69 years, died peacefully on Tuesday, January 12, 2021, of metastatic cancer. She was 91.

Sister Mary was well loved by her family, the Sisters, Holy Child Associates, friends, colleagues, and students, who cherished her kind and gentle spirit.

Rosemarie Tedesco, SHCJ, offered the following about her friend, “Sister Mary’s life was motivated by her deep love and devotion to God. Flowing from her commitment to God and without reservation, she loved all of God’s creation, especially her family, friends, the Society, and those she served. She was a gentle spirit, who reveled digging in the dirt as she planted and cared for her garden. That penchant for nurturing life was mirrored in her relationships – with her family, her Sisters, her retreatants, as well as the many she guided, sympathized with, or listened to in their need. Her sense of humor, too, was gentle. She was a delightful companion, always willing to share a pizza, go on a daytrip, or simply enjoy conversation. She embraced life and sought to live it fully in response to the God she loved so well.”



Sister Mary, who was born and raised in Philadelphia, attended high school at Saint Leonard’s Academy. Her deep faith in God and love for the Holy Child Sisters at Saint Leonard’s led her to enter the Society of the Holy Child Jesus soon after she graduated in 1948. Sister Mary made her first and final vows in 1951 and 1956, respectively. She became well known by her religious name Mother Mary Cleophas.

Sister Mary served as a classroom teacher for almost 20 years, with her first teaching assignment at her alma mater, Saint Leonard’s Academy (1951-1959). From there, she taught at School of the Holy Child Senior School, Rosemont (1959-1963), Oak Knoll School of the Holy Child in Summit, New Jersey (1963-1964), and School of the Holy Child in Rye, New York (1964-1970).

In 1970, Sister Mary was appointed to a six-year term as Province Leader of the Society’s former New York Province. Immediately following her term as Province Leader, she was called to serve on the Society Leadership Team in Rome, Italy, where she remained for 10 years. Her

administrative skills, intelligence, and spirituality were especially helpful during the challenging years that followed Vatican II, which also resulted in changes within the Society.

From 1987-1998, Sister Mary was missioned to Jos, Nigeria, where she served as the assistant novice director in the Society's African Province. Sister Mary once reflected, *"One of the things that I loved doing in Jos was teaching the novices about the life of Cornelia Connelly. I was often struck by how much they knew already and their deep love of Cornelia. Here were young women from various parts of Ghana and Nigeria who so closely related to an American woman from Philadelphia that they were called to serve as SHCJ Sisters. God's ways are wonderful!"*

After serving in Nigeria, Sister Mary returned to the Philadelphia area, where she was a spiritual director and English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at Providence Center, a community educational organization founded by the Holy Child Sisters in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. In 2005, she moved to Holy Child Center in Rosemont, where her gentle spirit and deep love for God brought pastoral care to the Sisters in community.

Sister Mary, with her love of gardening, tended to "God's gifts," a small area of vegetables and herbs she planted while living at Holy Child Center. In the spring of 2016, Sister Mary wrote a [beautiful reflection](#) on what gardening and vocations meant to her, which was published in *Actions*, a SHCJ magazine. In it she wrote, *"Only God could have thought of gardens and flowers with their colors, fragrances, and textures!"*

Jeanne Marie Hatch, SHCJ, shared the following about her long history and friendship with Sister Mary, "I first met Mary when I was a student at Saint Leonard's Academy, and she was a young teacher in the boys' school. To me, Sister Mary was one of the gentlest Holy Child Sisters at the school; and yet, she possessed an unwavering strength. It was a rare and powerful combination that all her students benefited from, including the boys. As Holy Child Sisters, we became good friends through our love of the ocean and shared vacations in Stone Harbor, New Jersey. Over the years, Sister Mary's fidelity, generosity, and courage deepened, and recently, these gifts enabled her to totally trust in God's love for her."

Sister Mary earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics in 1959 and a Master of Arts in Education in 1962, both from Villanova University.

She joins her parents George and Salome (Gale) Bryan and her brothers Walter, Paul, and Richard, and sister-in-law Laurette in eternal rest. She is survived by her brothers George and Joe and sisters-in-law Marie, Mimi, Kathy, and Donna and many nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, and great grandnieces and great grandnephews.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be sent to the Society of the Holy Child Jesus – American Province, 1341 Montgomery Avenue, Rosemont, PA 19010, or can be made online at www.shcj.org/american/donate.