

BRIGID MARY MCSWEENEY SS.CC.

England-Ireland

November 20, 1907 – December 18, 1999

Sister Brigid Mary McSweeney was born into a devout Irish Catholic family from Macroom, Co. Cork, Ireland on 20 November, 1907.

On completing her primary education at the Convent of Mercy in Macroom, Brigid Mary was sent to a boarding School in England for her secondary education, and although she cried leaving Ireland after each holiday, she kept her attachment to the Sisters who taught her, the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and she was one of their shining lights. On receiving a B.A. (Honours) and M.A. degree the young Brigid Mary obtained a teaching post in our School in Guernsey and it was from there that she entered our beloved Congregation.

On 2 February 1934, Sister Brigid Mary entered Picpus, Paris. She made her first profession on 17 February 1936 and her perpetual vows in Picpus on 17 February 1939 after which she was sent to Weymouth where she taught until 1945. In 1945 she was named Superior in Weymouth ('45-46) and Epsom ('46-51) and again Weymouth ('51-57). In July 1951, following Sister Mary Gretrude's transfer to Hawaii, sister Brigid Mary was given the added responsibility of Provincial, being renamed successively in 1956 and 1961. At the General Chapter of 1964 our dear Sister Brigid Mary was elected Superior General. Many tears were shed by the Sisters of the Anglo-Irish Province.

Sister Brigid Mary was respected as a talented and much loved teacher. During her years in the school, and also as Superior, she made a point of getting to know the name of each pupil and would always greet them by their name. She had a warm and vivacious personality and is still fondly remembered by many former pupils and parents.

As Superior General, Mother Brigid Mary played a significant role in the life of the Congregation. Although Provinces had been established by the General Chapter of 1948, it was Mother Brigid Mary who put into practice the principles of participation, co-responsibility and subsidiarity. A significant moment during Mother Brigid Mary's time as Superior General was the Special General Chapter of 1968 which she prepared with great care.

Mother Brigid Mary, who always displayed a certain simplicity of manner, helped the Congregation to return to a more simple style of life and created a familiar atmosphere by her example: she removed all the formalities surrounding relationship between Superiors and Sisters.

Mother Brigid Mary's love for the Congregation and her embodiment of our Charism was tangible; she was a woman of prayer and our eucharistic spirituality was always close to her heart.

After her resignation as Superior General in 1975 Mother Brigid Mary chose to minister to priests at the casa del Clero, La Scrofa, Rome. This came as no surprise as she has always shown great respect, consideration and care for the priests both within and without the Congregation. Many testify to her great friendship and support. How many of our Brothers from Belgium, Spain and Holland will remember how in the midst of all her responsibilities, she taught them English!

In 1986 Mother Brigid Mary retired to her native County Cork, in which is situated our nursing home in Youghal. It was Mother Brigid Mary who, at a time when it was very difficult for religious Congregations to get into the country, brought our Sisters to Ireland, serving firstly in Minor Seminaries in Cork before opening the first Sacred Hearts Convent on Irish soil in Youghal. How fitting that she should spend her final days in this same house.

During her lifetime, the Good Lord asked many sacrifices of his beloved daughter. In recent years she suffered much in spirit, perhaps the dark night of the soul.

To Mother Brigid Mary we say: "Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts", for your love and understanding and for your great service to the Congregation. We ask the Lord to welcome her home to that mansion which He has prepared for his "good and faithful servants".

We recommend Mother Brigid Mary to your prayer and ask you to thank God for her life.

Mary Lawrence O'Toole, ss.cc.
December 20, 1999.

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To celebrate 60 years in Religious life is an event which implies: Fidelity, self denial, sufferings and above all a lot of Love. This merits a tribute and especially as it concerns Mother Brigid Mary Mc Sweeney whom I love very much.

I knew her at the time she had just been elected Superior General. At the time of my temporary profession, I had written to her and had received an affectionate answer that I have kept since 1964.

When I was a young Sister in Salamanca, she came to visit and I had to recite something by heart which I forgot almost from the beginning ... She applauded and congratulated me as if nothing had happened.

In 1968, as a "Probanist", I had the opportunity to go to Rome and to be there at the moment of the Special General Chapter. During that period, I lived a complete year close to her, where I could observe and learn many things.

One day in the "avant chœur" (small room before entering the chapel) just before going to Chapel for an Adoration I risked asking her if the "Probanists" could assist at a general Chapter Session. She listened to me very attentively and told me to wait, as she had to consult the Assembly: the answer was YES!

As Via Cassia was the Generalate, very often priests or our Brothers would come to visit the "Mothers". Mother Brigid Mary always welcomed them and went to their masses even if some days it would be the third or the fourth one.

Very often, she came to help us wash the dishes. One day the Mistress of the "Probanists" caught us singing and she scolded us, then she noticed that Mother Brigid Mary was with us and she excused herself, but Mother Brigid Mary accepted the remark and we continued in silence. Very often when it was time to go to bed, we saw light in the laundry room: it was she that was helping to put the clothes in order or to iron it, if necessary.

She liked music and singing, so every week she and I went with Sister Louise Therese to a liturgy course given by Father Martorell T.O.R. (from Majorca, of course). She was the first one to go to pray. She was a person who could forgive, who wanted to help everywhere with great humility and simplicity. I wonder, who was helping her?

For all of this, I want to thank the Lord for her life, for her fidelity, for her love and service to the Congregation, and also to have met her and loved her. I also want to thank her for all she taught me without knowing it!

I give her a big kiss and wish her much happiness!

Luisa Maria Joy, ss.cc. (Spain)
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