

## Sister Marie Ellen Sullivan, S.P. 1927-2009

Sister Marie Ellen was a Guerin teacher and then director of student services before assuming the principalship in 1975. Little Marjorie Sullivan "wanted to be a teacher from day one," probably because of her gentle but persuasive role-model mother who taught exceptional children for many years at Chicago's Ryerson Public School. Something of that dedication undoubtedly entered into Marjorie's decision to enter the Sisters of Providence, then strictly "a teaching order."

For many years, Sister Marie Ellen continued her personal and professional education. This included a bachelors degree in English/Spanish and an M.S. in administration/supervision from Indiana State University. She also received a master's degree in pastoral studies at Loyola University.

Asked what was the most memorable during her principalship, Sister quickly replied, "Paying off the mortgage during Guerin's Silver Jubilee Year (1987) and beginning the Employee Pension Plan." She added, "being principal of the school bearing the name of our Foundress and seeing the faculty and staff implement Mother Theodore's famous quote: 'Woman in this country is only yet one-fourth of the family. I hope that through the influence of religion and education she will eventually become at least one-half – the better half.'"

To a rare degree, Sister Marie Ellen combined administrative excellence with community service. Volunteer work, she once described, as a "mutual relationship. It's part of our Christian heritage, this reaching out to one another."

She practiced what she preached, serving on the boards of several community organizations. These included GCAC (Girls Catholic Athletic Conference), Lone Tree Council of the Girl Scouts of America, Northwest Suburban Community Mental Health Consortium, Proviso Family Services and Leyden Family Service and Mental Health Center, including two terms as president of its board.

Sister also served in the ministry of care at St. Celestine parish and as minister to the sick at the Royal Elm Nursing Home. "She works with the poor and the sick of our parish on a regular basis," said Father Patrick O'Malley, then pastor of St. Celestine's. "She's a vital part of the entire parish."

Sister Marie Ellen's work as educator and volunteer was widely recognized. She was named "Educator of the Year" (1982) by the Triton College chapter of Phi Delta Kappa, an international professional fraternity in education.

She was cited (1985) by her own Guerin faculty/staff for "ten years of devotion and commitment" as the school's top administrator. Faculty, staff and students staged a jubilant Principal's Day with the light-hearted and affectionate theme of "She's a 10."

In recognition of her community service, the area Lerner Times named Sister its "Citizen of the Month" (December 1985).

In 1986, Sister Marie Ellen was one of four Chicagoland administrators to receive a Certificate of Recognition from the Illinois State Board of Education at its 13<sup>th</sup> annual statewide dinner salute to

recipients in the Board's "Those Who Excel Educational Awards" program. The program honored persons who made "outstanding contributions to education in Illinois."

Perhaps an all-inclusive and affectionate tribute to Sister's principalship and volunteerism was best given by long-time teacher Mary Smythe, in her own inimitable way at the Principal's Day assembly. The event, on the eve of Founder's day, also honored the memory of Mother Theodore Guerin. Mary said:

"Today we are sharing a joyous occasion to honor two great women who have touched all of our lives here at Mother Guerin. One, a woman who is responsible for the religious order of the Sisters of Providence in the United States; and the other, responsible for your education and my job..."

"This same woman runs this institution from every nook and corner of the building. You can find her adding a little seasoning to your lunch in the cafeteria, dispensing advice in the school corridors, directing traffic in our parking lot and dispersing Cupid in the Holy Cross parking lot. Sometimes you can even find her in her office where all, both faculty and students, are welcome... In her spare time, she offers her kind and gentle spirit...[to] various community projects which benefit all of us indirectly her sensitivity to the problems makes her loved by all. We are proud and happy to set aside this special day to honor the woman who could run General Motors from a phone booth, Sister Marie Ellen."

After leaving Guerin, Sister Marie Ellen reflected on her principalship. "In my present ministry as pastoral associate at St. Constance parish," she commented, nothing thrills me more than meeting Guerin grads at parish events, wakes, funerals, hospitals, weddings, and even in a Dairy Queen line on a hot summer night in Libertyville."

Then in a more serious vein, Sister reflected on her Guerin years. "They remind me very much of the life of the woman for whom the school is named. Mother Theodore's life was filled with joys and sorrows, ups and downs, successes and failures. This was our lot at Guerin from 1975-1987. We laughed and cried, celebrated and mourned, learned from our failures and sang our Alleluias just as Mother Theodore did. And – no matter what – we knew just as she did that 'Providence would rise before the sun.' To be part of Guerin for 16 years was a very special blessing for me."

In 2008, Guerin Prep honored Sister Marie Ellen for her service as an educator by creating the Sullivan Program. The program, administered through Guerin's Barbara Welch Learning Center, provides special services and a structured approach for academically-challenged students, helping build the skills needed to be successful in high school and beyond.

From an article written in 1999 by Sister Catherine Joseph Wilcox, SP