

**Remembering Frances Ryan, IHM (Frances Regina)
Jan. 25, 1938-Dec. 26, 2011**



This is what God asks of you – only this
That you do right,
That you love tenderly,
That you walk humbly with your God.

And Frances said:

“ONLY THIS!!!
More, by far, than a life’s work!”

According to Frances, as evidenced in this excerpt from her Book of Life, God showed a bit of humor in underestimating such a profound call. This mandate came to define Frances’ lifelong desire and commitment to be loving with and for others.

I have had the privilege and pleasure of seeking out the “Frances stories” in preparation for writing her Remembering. Each story echoed the realization of Frances’ desire for her life: to be a loving and caring woman, always about the work of creating and nurturing relationships. As Mary Agnes noted, she doesn’t ever think Frances indulged acquaintances only friendships. So the result was that she had friends as recent as the HCC staff and as deep and lasting as her friendship with her high school friend Mary Elizabeth Eilmeyer.

The foundation of Frances’ life was, in Mary Agnes’ opinion, a gift she internalized from the influence of their parents; the traditions of the congregation; her reading and meditation; and most of all, the workings of the Holy Spirit in her life. Frances’ spirituality was, in every way, unpretentious, and at the same time, profound, permeating her every relationship; her desires for herself; all those she loved; and all those she never knew but for whom she wanted peace and purpose.

Frances’ spirituality was revealed in her eyes, which radiated joy even during the most trying times; her smile which exuded a warmth and acceptance and love even when words failed her; a sense of inclusion even when she herself was slowly moving into eternity.

The manner in which Frances lived Micah was deep and gracious; she made holiness look natural as well as attractive even when “truth needed to be spoken to power.”

One of the Ryan family’s longest beliefs was that during their mother’s pregnancy with Frances, she sought Father Solanus Casey’s blessing. The tradition was that Father Solanus told her mother that “God would be pleased with this child.’ Mary Agnes believes that blessing extended her entire life.

When cleaning the room Frances used the last weeks of her life, Mary Agnes found, tucked into her wallet a small paper on which it seems Frances had written aspirations to which she aspired. It reads:

Happy moments, praise God.

Difficult moments, seek God.

Quiet moments, worship God.

Painful moments, trust God.

Every moment, thank God.

Frances lived this and did so in a way that challenges those with whom she interacted. Mary Agnes is forever changed by Frances' life and longings. She is "part of the fabric of her being."

Anne Mamienski remembers fondly how Frances kept her from going stir-crazy when she first joined the IHM community in 1985. Anne was finding life in Michigan a "slow jog" compared to the daily Florida warm and sunny "sprint" she was accustomed to in her life as a parish minister. In need of a diversion, Frances would take Anne on mystery trips. One of the most memorable was the time Frances took her to Chucky Cheese and they both stood there playing a game where mechanical moles would pop up and they would have to try to bop them with oversized mallets. Seems like Frances knew exactly what Annie needed at that moment in time.

Colleen Sheridan remembers how delighted Frances was when her brother, John, became a dad and she became an aunt. She loved to dote on her nieces and nephews and spend time with them. And of course we were the recipients of all the stories she shared about Maureen, Michael, Patrick, and Katie.

Dora Lezovich and Mary Agnes retell the story of the time the three of them rented a houseboat and were the captain, the crew and the cooks for a week, attesting to Frances' adventuresome spirit.

Frances met Peggy Drummond in 1981 when she was the DRE at St. Martin's and Peggy was a section head. Peggy can't say enough about the impact that Frances' presence had on her three sons. She said Frances' happy spirit attracted others like a magnet. She and Peggy had many adventures together from learning how to cross country ski, to ice fishing and skating. She spent a lot of time with the Drummond family. Peggy knew she could depend on Frances for anything, as evidenced by the time she and her husband were delayed out of state and didn't have any one to take care of their new puppy – Frances was there and made sure the puppy had everything it needed. As they both moved to different places and away from St. Martin's they nurtured their friendship through phone calls, getting together for lunch and Drummond family gatherings.

One of the pearls of friendship is the ability to intuit the other's need before it is spoken. Frances did this with such grace as Karen Eklund's dear friend and companion. When Karen moved home to our memory care unit Frances came every night to listen to the news with her. Most recently Karen had a felt need to come and be with Frances. So, Mary Copperstone accompanied Karen down to Frances' room and they all sat together singing hymns and songs. Mary Agnes was privy to this moment and was quite taken by the mutuality of the moment – that Karen was as much companioning Frances as Frances had companioned Karen.

Frances had a way of savoring life – whether it was a piece of blueberry pie, a morsel of chocolate, a good book, a puzzle or taking a dance class during her sabbatical – her enjoyment was palpable. She delighted in simple and profound joys. She was clearly in touch with her own humanity.

Her sense of humor was quick, spontaneous and so “on,” helping us focus on the human reality but never at the expense of another person.

Her travels took her to Puerto Rico as IHM Associate coordinator, and to Spokane, Wash., and Jerusalem for her sabbatical. They all provided her with opportunities to insert herself into another culture and to deal with the challenges of new languages. Frances also had the opportunity to travel a bit with Anne Mamienski in Brazil. When Frances first laid eyes on the Foz du Iguacu waterfall she felt only sheer amazement.

As a teenager Frances was a volunteer candy striper at the Sarah Fisher home. As an adult Frances' ministries continued to call her to be the consummate companion and friend. Early on when she taught at St. Hugo of the Hills grade school it was not unlike her to babysit for a family in the evenings or a weekend or to accompany families to a doctor and to follow up with them and make sure they were ok. These types of activities set her on a course – that no one would be left behind.

BJ Schlachter recounts that as IHM Associate coordinator, Frances knew and remembered the details of everyone's life. She knew each associate, the names of their family members, their jobs and where they worked, and their histories. She took a special interest in every associate on a personal level. She had a genuine interest in people. Occasionally BJ and Frances would go out for lunch at a favorite restaurant on Van Dyke. BJ said “She would always ask me about my family.” Frances would be quite content to spend time listening to BJ go through a “whole litany of family happenings” and then sit there and ask more questions! BJ would then try to steer the conversation to “more important things.” But, to Frances, the details about a person were important and she respected each person's story. Pat Guthrie, who was Frances “boss” during this period echoes what BJ said: Those who worked with Frances had great respect and confidence in her, and many have continued their relationship with her. She took a personal interest in each one and afforded each the

time that was needed in an interview, or when she made it a point of visiting them just to see how they were doing.

Frances took care to keep updated on the trends in the Church and her ministry so as to provide the best services to the communities in which she worked. Out of these new learnings grew her desire to initiate the Stephan Ministry Program while she was at St. Martin's in Warren. Stephan Ministry, as many of you know, is a program for training and organizing the laity to provide one-to-one Christian confidential care to hurting people in their congregations. Peggy Drummond said parishioners at St. Martin's responded positively to the invitation and at one point St. Martin's had more than 50 Stephan ministers in the parish, with the program still in existence today.

Her experience with Stephan Ministry led Frances to initiate the Ruth Companions program at the Motherhouse in the late '90s. Frances, along with Rosemary Ala, mentored the women at the Motherhouse who responded to this invitation to journey with another Motherhouse sister. They had monthly meetings with the companions. The purpose of Ruth Companions, much like the scripture story of Ruth and the mission of Stephan Ministry, was to provide companionship and a confidential listening ear for another.

The theme of companionship was pervasive throughout Frances' life. Not only did she devote much of her time and energy to companionship others, but she also knew how to "companion" herself. An extraordinary example of this self companionship was in the way she dealt with a lifetime of physical challenges. She never let those challenges define her life or hold her back from doing for others what her time and energy would allow. In the final months of her life, Frances' commitment to companion others had to give way to her need to be companioned. Health Care Center staff, friends and most of all, companion extraordinaire, her sister, Mary Agnes, were there to give Frances the same loving and nurturing care she had given to so many others throughout her life.

Companionship: to be for others, to be a listener, to encourage, to pray with and for others... This was the call Frances heard from God through Micah and indeed what she lived throughout her life

And to do this, ONLY THIS, was, for God and Frances

ENOUGH.

Written by Marianne Gaynor, IHM
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