

**SR. CLAIRE SULLIVAN, DW**  
**MARY CECILIA SULLIVAN**  
**SR. CLAIRE OF THE IMMACULATE**  
**9/21/34 – 1/11/19**

**Sr. Barbara O’Dea, DW**



I first met Mary Sullivan the day in 1952 that she entered the Daughters of Wisdom in Litchfield, CT. She was a lovely, uncomplicated young woman who took her religious formation seriously. We were blessed to have a wonderful Director of Novices, Mother Patrick. Sr. Claire said that Mother Patrick was one of the people who made the greatest impact on her life.

Years later, when asked why she entered the Daughters of Wisdom, Sr. Claire said: *“I met the Daughters of Wisdom in high school. They reached out to students with care, love and attention. Their spirit attracted me to join them, and I have never regretted it.”* To me, that sounds like vintage Claire Sullivan – simple, direct and to the point.

Claire made her first vows in the chapel at Litchfield on Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1954. Her first obedience was to Wharton Memorial Residential School, later re-named Maryhaven, for children who were mentally challenged. After making her final vows, she was sent to Seat of Wisdom college in Litchfield where she earned her degree in elementary education. Some time later, she completed her professional studies with a Master’s degree in special education from Fordham. After a short assignment at Norfolk Catholic High School, she returned to her beloved Maryhaven where she remained for seventeen years. Describing those years, Sr. Claire stated, *“What brought me a sense of joy as a consecrated religious was the care and encouragement I was able to give to children at Maryhaven. I had the pleasure of working with them for many years.”*

In September, 1981, Sr. Claire began a new stage of her life at St. Isidore’s parish school in Riverhead. Reflecting on her experience there, Claire wrote, *“The symbol that depicts me in my ministry is one of opening a geode - a stone so plain on the outside, but revealing incredible beauty within. As a third grade teacher at St. Isidore’s, I tried to lay before my students the wonders of math, science, and other subjects. I tried to stir their curiosity to question things and search for answers. In today’s technological world, it was my challenge to encourage them to think and reason and provide tools to solve problems as they emerge.”* Spoken like a true educator!

So far, so good, but some people are deceptive. For me, Sr. Claire Sullivan turned out to be one of them. I would like to introduce the Sr. Claire I have come to know as I listened to others



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speak of her. A few examples: Claire was a member of the Charismatic prayer group right here at Infant Jesus Parish since its inception and remained with it for decades. During that time she encouraged Roy Tvrdik, a young man considering priesthood to pursue his discernment. He did, and Fr. Tvrdik, SMM is here with us today. She also invited several members of the charismatic group to deepen their spiritual journey. One of them Tatty Powers had this to say about her: *“In 1972 Bill and I joined the charismatic prayer group at her invitation. We prayed together weekly, and I felt very blessed by that privilege. Sr. Claire is*

*quiet by nature, not because of a lack of things to say, but waiting for the appropriate moment to make her point. She was a confidant, an advisor, and a counselor – always ready to listen. Bill and I became Associates of the DW’s at her invitation. It has been a privilege to have a friend like Sr. Claire through whom Wisdom is obviously present.”*

Sr. Claire had a multitude of other roles. A teacher at St. Isidore’s described her as colleague and friend – then added, and mechanic. It seems she found her one day on the ground next to her car. Fearing Claire had fallen, she ran over, only to find her searching for the source of a strange noise under the car so she could fix it.

The DW community at Coram remember her as an organizer, avid gardener, community bursar sand the go-to person for all home repairs.

Sr. Claire was active in Infant Jesus parish. As Deacon Ken expressed it, “She was an institution in the parish.” Lucy Paplin, a member of the parish staff gave me a photo of a young Sr. Claire in the original habit of the Daughters of Wisdom from the chapel sacristy where it had been displayed for years. Lucy recalls her as a member of the group for the renovation of the parish hall. Claire located precious photos of the Montfort Fathers and Sisters for the entrance. At the blessing our pastor, Fr. Patrick gave it a new name: MONTFORT CENTER.



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The celebration of Sr. Claire's golden jubilee took place at a Sunday Mass in Infant Jesus. People in attendance recall that the electricity failed - no lights, no organ. Sr. Claire remembered the gospel. Jesus told his disciples to get into the boat and cross to the other shore. For Claire, it was an affirmation of a call she had recently received to leave the Port Jefferson area for a new ministry in Rome. She arrived there in 2004 and plunged into the community and her work with her usual energy.

In recent years failing health brought her to our retirement community in Sound Beach. She became a regular at the Senior Center where she discovered another of her gifts. She had always like to draw; there she turned her attention to painting. Later she moved to Maria Regina Nursing Home in Brentwood. In her final days, always peaceful, accompanied by her family and her Sisters, she waited for coming of the Lord to take her home.

This morning we remember her, we celebrate her, consoled by the belief that she is with Jesus and Mary whom she loved so much. We smile at the thought even as we comfort one another for her loss. **Au revoir, Claire, until we meet again.**

*Sr. Barbara O'Dea, DW*  
*1/15/19*

