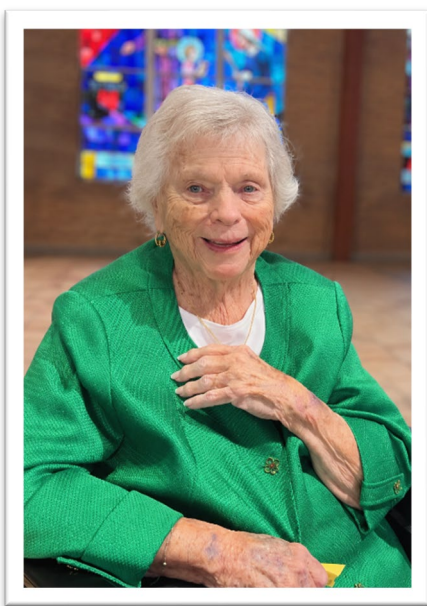




Sister Mary Jo Ward, SC

Entered eternal life on June 2, 2026

I was talking to Mary Jo about a week before she passed and we were making plans to have a “Praise God” moment at Maris Stella during the last week of August. Who knew that I would be doing a reflection on her life about 10 days later. Mary Jo was a very special Sister of Charity and friend, and I am honored to speak about her today.

Sister Mary Jo was born in Jersey City on August 8, 1931, to Thomas and Edna Ward. Her father was born in County Roscommon, Ireland and her mother in Brooklyn, NY. Mary Jo was so proud of her Irish heritage and Jersey City roots. She had two brothers James and Thomas who are deceased but has many extended family members who have been extraordinarily attentive to her and her needs for many years, especially nieces Colleen, Eileen and Patricia and her cousin, James. She always spoke lovingly about

her family and so enjoyed every get together with them.

Mary Jo attended Sacred Heart School, Jersey City and went to Saint Vincent Juniorate/Prep School at Convent to continue her high school education. After graduation, Mary Jo entered the Sisters of Charity on June 24, 1949. She graduated from the College (now University) of Saint Elizabeth with a degree in Elementary Education. In 1970, she attended St. Louis University and obtained a certificate at the Child Care Institute in preparation for her work at Saint Mary Residence.

Sister Mary Jo spent 41 years as a teacher in elementary schools. Saint Peter’s, Jersey City was her first mission where she ministered for 13 years and taught every grade from 1 to 8 and that is where she met her good friend Sister Francis de Sales. She also served in Saint Mary’s, Dumont and Saint Charles Borromeo in Newark. In 1969 Sister Mary Jo was missioned to Saint Mary Residence where she served for 4 years as House Mother and Administrator. After completing her service at Saint Mary’s, Mary Jo continued to minister in elementary schools for the next 23 years as a Title I Reading teacher in Saint Patrick’s and in PS 38 in Jersey City. In 1996, Sister Mary Jo retired from teaching and worked as an office assistant/volunteer in a medical office for several years.

Her life card indicates that she retired in 2007 – but do Sisters of Charity ever really retire? No, they find new avenues to pursue. She continued her ministry as a volunteer in Maryland, Newark, and Josephine’s Place in Elizabeth – collecting coats, sorting clothes for the homeless, donating to the food pantry always serving the needs of others.

When Sister Janet Lehmann brought nurses from Haiti to study, Mary Jo and Regis worked with the Administration and nurses from Trinitas to provide their necessities and to arrange housing for them. They were also very involved in the Children’s Project when they hosted children from Northern Ireland. To this day Mary Jo and Regis kept in touch with one of these young women. Their outreach was boundless.

Her favorite summer work was volunteering at Maris Stella with her dear friend Regis. She and Regis volunteered about 40 years. Maris Stella – our happy place is where I really got to know and love Mary Jo. She had a special gift for making everyone comfortable. She made every person feel special, and the guests at Maris Stella became some of her dear friends. When she came to work in the kitchen, I used to tell her she was in charge! And sometimes she banned me from the kitchen especially if I wiped the counter after she did it. If anyone got up

tight, she would say BREATHE!!! She was always calm, created a peaceful atmosphere, and there was lots of laughing.

For many years, Mary Jo was at Maris Stella for her birthday – what a day that was. Flowers and gifts arrived; visitors came, and we made her favorite dinner (meat loaf) and vanilla cake with chocolate icing. Mary Jo was definitely a party girl who loved to celebrate and taught many of us to celebrate life to the fullest. Another group that she celebrated with was the Saturday morning Breakfast Club that was comprised of women from the parish, former teachers and friends. Mary Jo was always up for a party!!

To the Sisters of Charity, her family, her many friends, Father Jim Worth who was pastor of the parish where they worshipped and Fathers Jim Manos, Tom Blind and George Ruane who knew her from Maris Stella and beyond, we offer our condolences.

One of our traditions before supper at Maris Stella was our holy hour where we Praised God. I would like to believe that Mary Jo is praising God now with Regis, Francis de Sales, Mary Lou Hayden, her parents and brothers as they and many Sisters of Charity welcome her home.

Mary Jo would not want us to be sad but rejoicing in her new life! Therefore, let me end this reflection in honor of Mary Jo by asking you all to praise God as Mary Jo did each day by her life.

PRAISE GOD Mary Jo

~ Sister Mary Morley, SC

As my sisters and I reflected on the life of our aunt, we thought about the Starfish story. We feel it reflects her life of giving and how she touched so many people along the way. Even though we can't make a difference to the whole world we can touch the lives of those who cross our path.

THE STARFISH STORY

An old man was walking on the beach one morning after a storm. In the distance, he could see someone moving like a dancer. As he came closer, he saw that it was a young woman picking up starfish and gently throwing them into the ocean. "Young lady, why are you throwing them into the ocean?"

"The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I do not throw them in, they will die," she said.

"But young lady, do you not realize that there are many miles of beach and thousands of starfish? You cannot possibly make a difference."

The young woman listened politely, then bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea.

"It made a difference to that one."

This special woman, we've come to celebrate today
Has made a difference to those she has met along the way.
She cared for and taught so many children back in the day
And she loved sitting on her bench down by the bay.
Not only did she love the beach and putting her toes in the sand
But she spent her life making a difference to anyone in need of an extra hand.
Giving so freely of herself just because
Is a testament to the amazing woman she was.
Patience, strength and resilience were some of her superpowers
As she survived open heart surgery, breast cancer, and lost her sight for countless hours.
She was an ear to whisper to, and made you laugh from head to toe
She loved to dress up and always looked just so.
She was known by many a name like sister, auntie, and Mary Jo.
As we take this moment to celebrate and send Sister Jo on her way
Let's live by her motto, "Do only the things that make you happy today."

~ Reflection and Poem by Patricia Ward,
niece of Sister Mary Jo