



## SISTER JOAN WILLIAMS

SEPTEMBER 21, 1927-DECEMBER 9, 2017

“I know the old ways. They are as familiar to me as the path I walked this morning. Now I dream of a new path that will lead to the heart of the mountain where it is always Advent, where Christ both hides and reveals himself.” (the closing words from Sister Joan’s book, ‘Growing Free’)

In the early hours of Saturday, December 9, Sister Joan walked that new path to eternal life. From an auto accident on the previous day, Joan’s already fragile health succumbed to her injuries. When we as a community gathered to pray the Morning Prayer of the Church, the service opened with words that affirmed her long years of dedicated life in Carmel:

Dawn finds me ready

To welcome you, my God

In September Joan celebrated her 90th birthday and 72nd year in Carmel. Previously, at a celebration of her 60

years as a Carmelite, Joan had summarized her spiritual journey.

“When I was 18, I wanted to be St. Therese of Lisieux, when I was 30, I wanted to be St. Teresa of Avila...now I just want to be myself!”

...we have all been enriched by this decision lived with passion, intuition and wit. We in this Carmel of Reno and countless friends have

accompanied Joan on her life journey and found companionship, spiritual guidance and fun.

Even as a young teenager, Joan was drawn to the contemplative life:

“Into my confused growing -up world of sun and shadow came another world of sun and shadow, came another kind of light, a pure gift from God. I began to be aware of Christ’s presence, an infinitely comforting Presence.”

Joan entered Carmel in 1945 and found the inspiration for her Carmelite vocation in the words of St. Teresa of Avila:

“Teresa’s words about prayer jumped out of the pages to me in an “aha” experience... “Since you are alone, the first thing you must do is look for a friend. I felt I had found my spiritual home”

Life in Carmel in 1945 still reflected 16th century customs but she embraced this life as she found it with a fervor that continued to characterize all she did... though she commented wryly: “here the clock has never been turned forward.”

In the 1960’s the Vatican Council directed religious orders to be part of contemporary life and culture and Joan responded with unbounded enthusiasm. To a deep commitment grounded in Carmelite spirituality, Joan added ‘aggiornamento’ (updating). The title of her book, ‘Growing Free’ captures the trajectory of her evolving spirituality and the Joan we knew in the Reno community-author, poet, scholar, spiritual councilor, and blogger.

“As my story continues, I like to think it will be a lived present day interpretation, however imperfect, of the prayer charism of the Teresian Carmel. Many erudite commentaries have been written on the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, but there is something to be said for the lived experience, such as my own. ”