

# BALTIMORE CARMEL News



Summer 2024

Remembering Sr. Mary Eileen McNamara

Sister Mary Eileen  
of the Blessed Trinity, OCD  
Mary Eileen McNamara



born January 10, 1920  
entered Baltimore Carmel May 31, 1941  
professed vows December 8, 1942  
returned to God February 23, 2024

...I know whom I have believed,  
and am convinced  
that he is able to guard  
what I have entrusted  
to him until that day  
*2 Tim 1:12*

Yes, O God,  
I believe it...  
it is you  
who are at the origin  
of the impulse,  
and at the end  
of that continuing pull  
which all my life long  
I can do no other  
than follow...

It is you yourself whom I find...

*Teilhard de Chardin,  
The Divine Milieu*

## Remembering Aunt Eileen - Peter McNamara



I am humbled to be asked to speak about the remarkable life of our dear Aunt Eileen. When one thinks of what a life well-lived may look like, our family thinks of Aunt Eileen. She has been and remains an inspiration for the ages, and for those of all ages.

Mary Eileen McNamara was the third of six children - four girls and

two boys. The family lived in Washington, D.C., near the National Zoo and Rock Creek Park. When I would ask about her childhood, Aunt Eileen would say what a wonderful childhood she had. The Great Depression brought hard times to so very many, and the strain on her family was not different from most. She appreciated that they always had food on the table and a roof overhead, and that she was always surrounded by family and friends. Most importantly, she had a very close relationship with her parents, and particularly with her mother, who later in life became a member of the Secular Order of Carmel.

Mary Eileen graduated from Sacred Heart High School, completed one year at Wilson Teachers' College, and then worked as a legal secretary for her father for almost three years. She was 21 years old when she entered the Carmelite Monastery in downtown Baltimore, in May 1941. Six months

later, Aunt Eileen received the Carmelite Habit and became a Novice, on December 7, 1941. Her Final Profession and Veiling occurred four years later. She was cloistered in downtown Baltimore for 20 years, until 1961, when the community moved to this location. When later asked, Aunt Eileen simply said that from an early age, she heard the Lord's Voice calling her to be a Carmelite.

### Recollections

It was strange as a young child to visit someone who was fully cloistered. We would arrive full of energy, having been in a car for over an hour, sharing the backseat with siblings and no seatbelts. We would be greeted only by a voice, which directed us into a visiting room (called a Speak Room). I remember two rows of chairs facing a wall that featured a large wooden grill and a heavy curtain behind it. It was like going to see a movie with no screen. Aunt Eileen then would come into the adjacent room, on the other side of the grill, and because of the curtain we could not see each other but could speak with each other. At some point Aunt Eileen would say those magic words, "Alice, I think the children have been so good, perhaps they would like some milk and cookies." We would all jump up and then stare at the Turn, the magical wooden lazy susan, that eventually would spin and provide a big pitcher of cold milk and

lots of cookies. We also would use it to transmit our cards and school pictures to Aunt Eileen. I think she could appreciate how important that mysterious Turn was to a young child.

As this beautiful chapel illustrates, the Carmelite community embraced the spirit of Vatican II after being fully cloistered. Similarly, Aunt Eileen became like a supernova, energized to engage more actively with the world around her. And always making more connections and friendships.

Aunt Eileen also now could join us for some family events, like weddings, birthdays and funerals. Our family in turn was able to visit here more at Carmel. Over the years since then, we started having an annual family Mass and picnic at Carmel, which continued for many years until COVID. The Masses and picnics were a great opportunity for our extended family to catch up with Aunt Eileen and with the entire Carmelite community, as with some other special milestones celebrated at Carmel, including two weddings and several baptisms. Aunt Eileen became and was the center of our family, in so many ways.

### Universal Truths

I have a few observations about Aunt Eileen which some siblings or cousins have confirmed. My cousin Marty has designated them as "Universal Truths."

- Aunt Eileen was the best active listener I have ever met - you always had her full attention, she let you know she was listening, there was no judgment, and she did not interrupt. Instead, she asked questions about you; when asked, she shared her memories or thoughts simply and directly. She always made you feel so special.





### *The Vegetable Garden*

Mary Eileen was utterly committed to life in the community. Her fidelity to community prayer and the celebration of Eucharist was legendary. And she was faithful to the rounds of daily work. She made dozens of loaves of pumpkin bread each year for the fund-raising efforts of the Carmelite Guild, which existed into the 1990's and helped pay for this monastery. She knitted wool hats and scarves to help supply her friend Ann Ames with these items for children who needed them. And then there was THE VEGETABLE

GARDEN in our west meadow and her draw on family and friends to help grow our food.

She felt herself always connected to that graced Presence of Trinitarian life in her soul; that was important! Mary Eileen lived the prophetic life she had professed through her religious vows. She also incarnated the archetype of the strong woman, the wild soul. She dreamed the dream of woman's creativity and energy and how it might help to transform our struggling world and its peoples. She lived "in the time given her" as so many saints do. Her foundation for contemplation and action was a deep mystical life of

prayer in God, educated and practiced through many years of faithful Carmelite life. This life gradually freed her: to be honest, to love and to become whole. And to remain faithful through it all. A transformation, if you will.

### *Thank You Dear Sister*

A few days ago at our morning Mass we heard the reading from chapter 47 of the prophet, Ezechiel: God measures out a great river flowing from the Temple and says: Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live, and there shall be abundant fish, for wherever this water comes, the sea shall be made fresh... Along both banks of the river, fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade nor their fruit fail... Their fruit shall serve for food and their leaves for medicine, for healing (v 9 and 12). I couldn't help but think of the utter fullness of Sister Mary Eileen's life at the end.

*So, thank you, dear sister, for being with us all these endless years. Take our gratitude and love with you into the visions of your eternity life. Wait for us. You have helped hold everything together; you are a beautiful Carmelite spirit.*

Sr. Colette Ackerman, OCD

Many stories come to mind from Mary Eileen's long life of sharing her Carmelite spirituality with others. She told us about one mother who brought her children to visit, and the youngest child told Sr. Mary Eileen: my mother told us we were coming to visit someone who believes in God. Her developing faith and love impelled her to reach out constantly with courage and great love to all those who came her way.

She relished her time answering the door and the phone and was a master at answering the community correspondence. This was a major ministry and work of the house which, again, Sister Mary Eileen filled for years. Later she organized her discussion groups to share Carmelite spirituality with so many folks. She fostered inter-faith connections, especially with the Jewish Community, through participation in "The Women of Faith." And all of her reading, study and prayer came into play as she guided the Secular Carmelites for years as they met here at the monastery. At some point she also began arranging each summer for the "McNamara picnic," held in June, which brought together her family for Mass, sharing of life-events and an afternoon of food, relaxation and games.



Mary Eileen receiving promises of Secular Order Members