

WELCOME AND EULOGY FOR SISTER EVELYN MCGOVERN'S FUNERAL

March 17, 2022

Mount St. Joseph, Peterborough

'Top of the mornin' and a warm Irish welcome to all our sisters gathered here at Mount St. Joseph chapel and sisters joining us from various missions across Canada. We are so happy to have some of her McGovern family with us today - her niece Christine and husband Dennis, their two daughters, Brianna and Alyssa, as well as nephews, David and Mark Lauzon. Your love, admiration and care for Evelyn over the years filled her with deep consolation and joy. We welcome into our virtual gathering all our Upper Room community, the O'Toole families, and our good friend, Sr. Monica Hartnett in Wales. In this fond moment of farewell, we have all come together to celebrate the life and legacy of our dear Sister Evelyn. This wide circle of friends surely gives testimony to her capacity to love, make connections and lasting friendships.

As many of you have remarked over these past days, Evelyn was a woman of wisdom and integrity. She spoke with few words, from a place of depth and reflection, often sprinkled with her own unique McGovern wit. Over the years of our shared ministry, I have come to know that Evelyn was the heart and soul of our Upper Room ministry and I became its voice and pen. I have had the joy of witnessing over these past three decades the deepening silence and quiet communion she lived within, in such ease, gentleness and peace. She enjoyed life's simple pleasures, in her unassuming and uncomplicated manner of being.

What many of you may not know about Evelyn is that she was born with a cleft palate which meant that she was unable to speak and be understood. In her school years at Perpetual Help School in Ottawa, she was mocked, called 'marble mouth', and children avoided playing with her on the school yard. She did not have corrective surgery until she was in the convent and was 20 some years old. Then it meant years of speech therapy and her voice opened. Evelyn spoke now and people listened, always, to what she had to say.

I remember her telling me this story when we first started doing Inner Child Healing ministry. When she was seven years old this wisdom insight came to her: She realized 'speaking' for her was a dangerous thing! Then she said, *"One day, I just got it! Everyone likes to talk, tell their story. I am going to be a good listener!"* That direction became a bedrock foundation she emulated for the rest of her eighty years. Listening, listening with the heart, was of her essence. To be seen, heard, loved by Evelyn, was a precious gift.

The lessons learned from this early childhood experience - twenty some years in silence, active silence, set a path for Evelyn's destiny, and dare I say, greatness as a person who excelled – over the years – *“to be and become the person God wanted her to be, in nature, in grace and in glory, in time and for eternity.”* This was one of her favourite maxims of Father Medaille, our founding spiritual father.

A second childhood lesson Evelyn shared with me was her habit of just going over to sit in the Perpetual Help Church across the street from her home. She was attracted to just be there in quiet with Jesus and the Blessed Sacrament. It was safe. She didn't have to talk, she was listened to and loved by her Jesus. I see in this practiced habit from childhood her luring call, even then, towards a contemplative lifestyle.

Sister Evelyn's early ministry as a young Sister was as a music teacher in Peterborough, St. Andrews West and Ottawa. As a child and throughout high school she received lessons from Sister St. Hubert and Sister Agnes Teresa and became accomplished in conservatory piano teaching, playing organ and directing choirs. Her St. Andrews West students came to visit her yearly. They would tell her that it wasn't just the notes and timing and musicality that Evelyn was there for... the listening presence she had made habitual by now... meant her students could open up and tell their stories, their struggles. She heard them and helped them as best she could. But after twelve years of music teaching she realized she needed some professional training, if she was to be 'the listener' to other people's lives. She asked to study and received her masters in educational counselling. Not surprising maybe, her counselling office was her car. She was mobile and available for service as a pastoral agent working with various public health and community centres through the St. Vincent de Paul and Perpetual Help Parish. She would drive to homes, doctor's offices, agencies, advocating and assisting the needs of the poor, the marginalized and new refugees.

When Evelyn welcomed me to begin the Upper Room Home of Prayer ministry in 1984 with her at Primrose Residence in Ottawa, she very soon expressed to me her own attraction to a more contemplative lifestyle. Gratefully, from the beginning, I recognized that we were co-directors, partners in this ministry. I needed and trusted her discernment, her maturing wisdom and solid common sense. Our journey over thirty-eight years has been so blessed and fruitful. To those of us who knew her well, Evelyn has brought a quiet, steady, supportive presence to all things ministry! She could speak her mind, often prophetically – with courage and authority. Truth and integrity shone in and through her. In her later years, wisdom, kindness, expansive love grew visible in her and around her. I see today Evelyn's life as a legacy pointing all of us to live in this way of littleness and hiddenness and simplicity within the heart of God's love. No need for fanfare or extraordinary heroics! All of us can find the way to such healing, holiness and deep peace.

As Evelyn lay dying last Sunday morning the Gospel of Transfiguration was being proclaimed in churches and chapels and on television screens around the world. She was conscious and comfortable and all she wanted was to sleep, and in that sleep ...she came into the sleep of the saints. I am confident her Beloved opened the doors to welcome her into her eternal home. Evelyn chose this resurrection story for her funeral liturgy. Mary Magdalen went out early in the morning to seek and anoint Jesus' body. Shocked at not finding him in the tomb, she experienced that solitary meeting in the garden. He called her by name "*Mary*" and she, knowing well that voice, softly named his – "*Rabboni*". I believe we all want to imagine that Evelyn's moment of resurrection was Jesus calling her by name... maybe not Mary Evelyn Frances McGovern... but more likely an affectionate "*Evy*" ... and she knowing well the sound of his voice, softly spoke his, "*Jesus*".

We are blessed to have known, loved and lived with this wonderful woman of faith and fidelity for a fullness of years. From the woman known for her few words I sense her saying "*that's enough now*". Let us all now celebrate together Eucharist ... giving thanks ... in the one wonderful holy communion we all live in. Truly, the love of Christ has gathered us together as one this day!

Evelyn, rest now in holy peace.