

SISTER MARIE JOANN LEWKO

Sister Marie JoAnn Lewko, 58, a Felician Sister for 39 years, died peacefully in Our Lady of the Angels Convent, Enfield, Connecticut on February 15, 2010.

Born in Brooklyn, NY on October 22, 1951 she was the oldest daughter of the late John and Theresa (Zur) Lewko. As a member of Our Lady of Consolation Parish, Brooklyn, JoAnn attended the parish elementary school and was taught by the Felician Sisters. Their positive influence guided her in making the decision to follow Jesus as they did and so she applied to Our Lady of the Angels Academy/Aspirancy, Enfield. Following graduation in 1970 she was accepted by the Felician Sisters as a postulant. In 1973 she made her first profession of vows and in 1979 professed perpetual vows.

Having received a BA in English from Rivier College, Nashua, NH and an MALS from Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT Sister Marie JoAnn was well prepared professionally to serve as a teacher and administrator. She served at ministries staffed by Felician Sisters in New York, Massachusetts and Maine. Her most recent assignment was as principal at St. Bernard School, Enfield.

Her dedication to the Felician community found her in many and varied leadership roles including local minister, provincial council member, general chapter secretary in 2000, provincial chapter delegate and secretary, and several provincial and interprovincial task forces,

Sister Marie JoAnn had a special love for the Foundress of the Felician Sisters. In 1992 she authored the book On Earth as in Heaven—the Life Story of Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska. Sister JoAnn was inspired by the Felician foundress she described as a woman “who with courage and faith walked beside the people of nineteenth-century Poland and bestowed a legacy of innate graciousness, humble strength, and boundless compassion that spanned class distinctions, rigid systems, and time itself.”

Throughout her life of dedication and prayer, she used her many gifts and talents as *gift* returned to God, to her Felician community, to her family and to all with whom she worked. Sister loved life and influenced the lives of a countless number of people.

In 1957, when she was only six years old, doctors discovered a congenital heart defect and in 1958 performed successful heart surgery. Over the years Sister underwent cardiac catheterizations and surgeries to remedy her heart condition. In the fall of 2009 Sister encountered serious heart failure. On December 8, 2009 she was admitted to Brigham & Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA with the hope of receiving a heart transplant. Hope was high on January 25, 2010 when news came that a heart was available for transplant and Sister was prepared for surgery. Later that day the disappointing news came that the heart was diseased and the transplant did not take place.

Sister maintained a confident trust in God’s will and was very much at peace in making her decision to discontinue further treatment and return home to her Felician family in Enfield, CT on January 29. Her Felician sisters, family members and friends supported Sister JoAnn with prayer and presence until the Lord called her to her heavenly home on February 15, 2010.

Survivors include her sisters Valerie Walendziak of Uncasville, CT and Lorraine Van Luvender of Brooklyn, NY.

The wake was held on February 19, 2010 from 1:30 to 8:00 pm in Our Lady of the Angels Convent. The wake service and translation of the body to the chapel followed by Evening Praise took place at 4:30 pm in the convent chapel.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on February 20 at 10:30 a.m. in Our Lady of the Angels Convent Chapel, Enfield. Archbishop Henry J. Mansell and Bishop Peter A. Rosazza of Hartford were in attendance. Rev. John Melnick, pastor of St. Bernard Parish was the main celebrant and homilist. Concelebrants included Rev. George Auguscik, OFM, Conv, convent chaplain and Rev. Jeffrey V. Romans, secretary to the archbishop, Rev. Dariusz Gosciniak, Rev. Marcin Pluciennik, Rev. J. Daniel McElheron, Rev. William Baldyga, Rev. Anthony Bruno, Rev. John Gwozdz, Rev. George Couturier and Deacon Edward Szewczyk, all serving the Archdiocese of Hartford. Rev. Msgr. Anthony Czarnecki and Rev. Tomasz Borkowski represented their respective parishes in the Diocese of Worcester, MA.

Family members, Felician Associates, friends; representatives from the Hartford Archdiocesan School Office, classmates, students from Our Lady of the Angels Academy, faculty, staff and students of St. Bernard School, Little Angels Pre-school and St. Martha School joined the Felician Community for services.

Sister Marie JoAnn was laid to rest in the Felician Sisters plot in St. Adalbert Cemetery, Enfield, CT.

Sister JoAnn likened her earthly journey to the poem by Robert Frost entitled, "The Road Not Taken." In his homily, Father Melnick focused on the lines "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--I took the one less traveled by/And that has made all the difference." He said: "Sister saw this as her allowing God's will to govern her life . . . as a religious . . . as a teacher . . . an administrator and councilor. . . each experience . . . was the one less traveled by and has made all the difference." He concluded, "Ironically, her [Sister JoAnn's] physically weakened heart was one of the biggest and strongest spiritual hearts."