



Born to New Life

Sister Lillian Ernest, MPF



Sister Lillian Ernest, MPF, age 92, died peacefully on May 15, 2025, at St. Joseph Hall Infirmary, Villa Walsh, Morristown, New Jersey.

Sister Lillian was born to Edward and Stella (Zidiak) Ernest in Jersey City, New Jersey, on August 9, 1932. She entered the Religious Teachers Filippini in 1955. She received the habit in 1956 and made her religious profession in 1959. Sister Lillian earned her BS and MA in Special Education from Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey.

In her 68 years of religious life, Sister Lillian was engaged in various ministries. She began her apostolic years as a classroom teacher, but soon fulfilled her passion: Special Education. How she loved God's special children! For 32 years Sister Lillian generously served as teacher and Administrator in the Mount Carmel Guild of Catholic Community Services in the Archdiocese of Newark. Sister Lillian also served as Parish Religious Education Coordinator in the Diocese of Trenton, appointed a local convent Superior, engaged in pastoral care to the infirm Sisters in Freytag Hall at Villa Walsh, appointed Formator, and elected Provincial Councillor. The last phase of her active ministry was to the Sisters in St. Joseph Hall. In this capacity Sister Lillian served as Superior with a heartfelt commitment to meet the Spiritual needs of the Sisters. In 2022 when her health began to decline, Sister Lillian became a resident of St. Joseph Hall.

The Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Lillian was held in Saint Lucy Chapel at Villa Walsh on Thursday, May 22, 2025. Her body was laid to rest in Ave Maria Cemetery at Villa Walsh.

In his homily, the Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli, Bishop Emeritus of Paterson, began his homily with the following story which he related to the life of Sister Lillian. *"One day, a roofer leaned his ladder against a house and climbed up to the roof to repair it. A small boy playing about the yard saw the ladder and began to climb it. Coming out to check on her son, his mother was shocked to find that he was more than half way up the ladder. She panicked, but the roofer didn't. He saw the child and knew the danger. He calmly said to the young boy, 'Son, look up here, look up to me and keep climbing.' Rung by rung, he kept gently saying, 'Keep looking up at me, and keep climbing.' At last, the child was safe in his arms. From her earliest years, all her life, Sister Lillian kept looking up to the Lord as he called her to come closer and closer to himself. As a young girl in Jersey City, she heard him call her to be involved in the life of her parish. A few years later she responded unhesitatingly when he called her to come into a deeper relationship with him as a religious."*

Sister Ascenza Tizzano, General Superior, in her letter of sympathy recalled: *"Sister Lillian's gentleness and goodness, combined with sound judgment and specific skills, were noted early in her religious life. This inspired our superiors at that time to send Sister Lillian to Saint Coletta's in Wisconsin, where they serve and train individuals to assist children with special needs. This opportunity prepared Sister Lillian for a new ministry. On her return, under the direction of the Mount Carmel Guild in the Archdiocese of Newark, Sister Lillian was well-equipped to begin an extensive mission as both teacher and then administrator, supporting children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. ... There were intervals during these years when Sister Lillian and our other sisters who accompanied her in this ministry were celebrated and highly praised for their exceptional contribution to this ministry of special education. ... I want to express again sentiments of gratitude to Sister Lillian for the many ways she contributed to the mission of our consecrated life and how she fulfilled the needs of the Community, always ready to say 'yes' and accept with dignity and dedication any responsibility or challenge asked of her. Thank you, again, Sister Lillian! Today, celebrating the beauty of her life, may it be a source of inspiration for each of us to live our consecrated lives more gently and with a greater and more sincere love."*