

Vita of Sister Joan Ann Gilsdorf



Baptized Joanna Anna and called Joanne by her family, Joan Ann Gilsdorf was born in 1927 in Toledo on

May 30, the feast of the recently-canonized Joan of Arc, the sixth of the seven children of Arnold J. and Lillian Thiel Gilsdorf. Joanne entered St. Francis Convent as a postulant on September 8, 1946, and, on August 12, a year later, received a habit and a new name, Sister Mary Francis. Sister Francis made her first Profession on August 12, 1949, and her Final Profession on the same date in 1952. In 1984 Sister Mary Francis returned to the

shortened form of her baptismal name and we've known her ever since as Sister Joan Ann, but Sister Joan Ann would tease one of the aides at St. Francis Home and tell her she was *Jo-hah*-na. A question: Did her family call her *Jo-ahn*-na?

While Sister Joan Ann saw herself also as serious and sensitive, she is remembered as having been noticed more than once as an Ingrid Bergman look-alike. She was energetic, athletic, giggly, and fun loving, a LOT of fun. She brought all these qualities to her work as the housekeeper at North Auburn, Millersville, Blakeslee, Miller City, the St. Joseph Renewal Center in Tiffin and St. Bonaventure's in Toledo. Sister Joan Ann loved children. Her being the "cook" Sister for the teachers at these places meant the school children got to know her too.

Although being a housekeeper *did* involve cooking, her ministry after those years mostly involved food service at larger institutions — a short term at St. Anthony's Villa in Toledo, Camp Lady of the Lake in Erie, Michigan, the dining room at the Pilgrim House in Carey, the men's kitchen and then the main kitchen at the Motherhouse. In 1961, just after she was appointed the kitchen supervisor at St. Francis Home, she began four summers of four-week courses in food service management at Fontbonne College, now Fontbonne University, in St. Louis, Missouri. During 1971, she received additional education through an in-service at Cleveland's Women's General Hospital. For the next 10 years, Sister Joan Ann worked in one of the kitchens at the Motherhouse. While at the Motherhouse, at Christmas time in particular, her artistic talent was very much in evidence. She would paint the dining room windows with Christmas scenes. One year she painted the scene in the window of the Christmas stable used in the Motherhouse chapel and that may be the one there now.

In 1983, after nearly 30 years of being in a kitchen, Sister Joan Ann took some time off and went back to housekeeping. Her time away from a kitchen included working in the carpenter shop, refinishing or refurbishing old, worn-looking furniture and refinishing doors and woodwork for the Holy Family building renovation. She loved working with wood and enjoyed it so much, she continued with that kind of work even after going back to food service, which she did in 1990 when she joined the dietary staff at St. Francis Home.

While there, she became THE baker at the Home. Pies, cakes, cookies, and all other desserts, the jellos, puddings, whatever, for residents, meetings, parties, celebrations, were her responsibility. Someone who worked with her said, during that time, she “worked her tail off!” The time involved three nursing homes in town closing and the transporting of food to them until all their residents could be placed, a matter of meals — and desserts — for about 170 people altogether.

In 2002, Sister Joan Ann left food service altogether for something totally different. She served as the Director of the Historical Museum two years, an even greater challenge due to the damage caused by the November 2002 tornado but kept herself busy with other assignments at the Motherhouse while repairs were made.

In 2004, Sister Joan Ann felt the call to something altogether different again. She joined Sister Andrea Inkrott in Charlotte, North Carolina, as a companion in the House of Discernment for young women contemplating religious life. She proved to be a very good companion to a young Hispanic woman the two years she lived with them, praying with her and helping her gain an understanding of community living as well as helping her with English and to learn the ins and outs of American-style cooking. When Sister Joan Ann came back to Tiffin six years later, she continued her fun-loving ways when she moved to the Assisted Living facility at Friedman Village, a home which she loved and from which she frequently walked over to the convent to visit Sisters there. In 2017, she moved to St. Francis Home where, until her death at age 92, on Friday, January 10, 2020, she continued the ministry of prayer she had at Friedman.

It was not all work and no play for Sister Joan Ann. It was “no, thanks” when invited to play cards or bingo or do anything “techie,” like computers, but she loved nature, being outdoors, going on long bicycle rides, frequently riding on the

River Road, sometimes even as far as Fort Seneca. She was no stranger to camping. Mohican State Park, Hocking Hills, even St. Angela Park on the convent grounds drew her and like-minded Sisters. For a number of summers, two tents and evening bonfires were a common sight. With Sister Joan Ann's fire-blackened cooking pot or a stir-fry pan and contributions from campers to fill it, they and their guests had wonderful evenings, and popcorn or s'mores, around the fire. One problem, — no, two: mosquitoes and no bathrooms...! Inside, while she loved most all music, classical music was what she listened to. She had learned to play the trumpet, and sometimes could be heard playing it. Until the last several months, she knew the words and her strong voice was part of the chorus when residents sang familiar songs and did exercises as activities at the Home.

While being so busy in the kitchen at St. Francis Home, Sister Joan Ann acquired Max, a six-year-old full-bred beagle, a rescue dog, that with lots of TLC, seemed to relax and enjoy being with people. With him, she had another reason to indulge her love of walking when she daily took him out, whatever the weather. When she went to North Carolina, Max became the family pet of a nearby neighbor, but whenever she came back to Tiffin, as long as he lived, Sister Joan Ann spent a joyful time visiting and walking Max. In Charlotte, she made friends with every dog around.

Sister Joan Ann loved her family. She was predeceased by her parents and by her brothers and sisters and in-laws, Arnold M.; Lawrence and his wife, Virginia "Ginny"; Margaret Mary Pitcher and her husband, James; her sister-in-law, Joan Gilsdorf, wife of Vernon; Elizabeth "Betty" Langenderfer and her husband, Lawrence "Larry"; and Barbara Jean Petsche and her husband Rudolph "Rudy"; and also by several nieces and nephews. She is survived by her brother Vernon, many nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, and great-grandnieces and nephews as well as by the Sisters and Associates of her Tiffin Franciscan community.

May she rest in peace. *Requiescat in pace.*