

Parish Neighbors of South Shore

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**SR. MARY FERRER
MCLEAN OP:
OPENING DOORS**



PHOTO BY DOMINICAN SISTERS OF AMITYVILLE | PAGE 8



SR. MARY FERRER MCLEAN: OPENING DOORS

By Thomas P. Cummings | Photos by the Dominican Sisters of Amityville



Born on December 14, 1923, Mary Ann was the first of four children born to William and Evelyn McLean, a devoted Irish Catholic family. She was baptized at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Astoria Queens. During her youth, she witnessed the lively Roaring Twenties, followed by the Great Depression and the entry of the United States into World War II. The world was in a topsy-turvy state. Mary Ann sought the peace and serenity of the religious life.

Mary Ann McLean began that journey when she walked up the path to Villa Maria, a stately mansion in Water Mill, N.Y., with rolling lawns and the peaceful Mecox Bay in the background. Villa Maria had been established as a facility for aspirants to the Dominican Order. Mary Ann must have wondered what lay in store for her as the door opened to the next stage of her life.

The nineteen-year-old Mary Ann entered another door, that of the Motherhouse of the Order, in Amityville, N.Y. on February 2nd, 1942, the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord. Six months later, on August 4th, at that time the Feast of St. Dominic, Mary Ann entered the Amityville Dominicans receiving her habit and her religious name, Sister Mary Ferrer.

The doors of Brooklyn College opened, affording the opportunity to further her education, and she earned degrees in elementary education and data processing. Following her graduation, Sister Mary Ferrer began her teaching career, first at St. Joseph School in Astoria, then as the eighth grade teacher at the newly constructed Cure of Ars Catholic School

in Merrick, N.Y. She developed her gifts for educating and inspiring young minds.

At Cure of Ars, each boy in the 8th grade class of sixty boys towered over the diminutive nun. On the first day of class in September of 1958 she told her students, "You have come in here as babies, you'll leave as men." Sister's reputation as a strict disciplinarian had earned her the moniker "Ferrer the Terror." There was to be no trifling with Sister. Two of her young charges were inspired by Sister to seek admission into St. Pius X Preparatory Seminary, one of them, up until then a lackadaisical student, began to develop his self-confidence. At the graduation ceremony, that student was astonished when, for the first time, he made the honor roll.

In 2013, that student, on a visit to Long Island, arranged to meet with Sister. When, with his wife and their priest son, he picked Sister up to take her out to dinner, he was stupefied when she appeared in a pink two piece suit. His memory of her was in her white habit with a black veil. At dinner, Sister's joyful spirit was a delight.

Sister regaled them with many stories. She spoke of her Saturday morning walks to the bank in Merrick. During the week, candy and snacks were sold at recess to the students for two and six cents apiece. Two sisters walked side-by-side, jointly carrying the heavy bag of coins. Sister claimed that she held her right hand inside her habit as if she were carrying a gun to ward off any robbers. Everyone at the table broke into laughter. Sister Ferrer was an entertainer.

Following her career as an educator, opening up her students' minds, Sister Ferrer returned to the Motherhouse in Amityville. There she entered the doors of a local beauty school and earned her Beautician License, which helped her in her volunteer work. Later, she became the Program Director in Amityville ministering to her sisters.

Early in life, Mary Ann McLean, having inherited a creative spirit and skilled hands, worked in her family's construction business. She continuously sought ways to continue to develop her talents. For more than eighty years she served the Dominican community and her students, inspiring everyone she touched to develop their own God-given talents.

Sister Ferrer lived up to her chosen motto, which was from the writings of Meister Eckhart, OP: "Be prepared at all times for the gifts of God and be always ready for new ones."

Sister Mary Ferrer McLean went to her eternal reward on February 21st, 2022, a worthy servant who opened many doors during her lifetime.



Do you know a fellow parish member who has a story to share?

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