

Name: Sister Mary Stephen Keller
Date of Birth: December 4, 1935
Place of Birth: Appleton, Wisconsin
Parents: Dr. William George and Helen Anna (Blick) Keller
Religious Profession: August 15, 1959
Date of Death: June 13, 2023
Age: 87
Years Professed: 63



Reflection by Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director

Barbara Ann Keller was the fourth child born to Dr. William George and Helen Anna (Blick) Keller. She was born in Appleton, Wisconsin on December 4, 1935. She was baptized at St. Therese Catholic Church in Appleton on December 8, 1935 and confirmed there on May 31, 1950. Barbara had two brothers, William and Tom, who are both deceased and three sisters, Joan, who died at age four before Barbara was born, Dorothy (Dot) and Kathy.

Barbara attended St. Therese Elementary School in Appleton and St. Mary High School in Menasha, Wisconsin, where she earned her Diploma on May 30, 1954. During her senior year of High School, Barbara sensed a call to become a Sister. At that time, she did write to the Vocation Directress at Holy Family Convent for information on becoming a Sister. She put the material sent to her aside. She had inquired and now she would go on with her life.

For three years, Barbara worked as a secretary for Peoples Loan and Finance Company. During that time the thought to become a Sister, to go and see, never went away. She recalls bargaining with God: "After high school"; "After I get a good job"; "After I buy a car"; "Before I look into a second job." With continued prayer, silence, retreats, and the example and support of her parents, she finally accepted the invitation to write her letter asking for an application form.

Barbara wrote the following letter, dated February 28, 1957, to Mother Edna:

Dear Mother General,

About three years ago, I wrote to you asking for information about the Convent. I received a reply from you, along with information desired. I was 18 years old at that time, a senior in high school, and after two and a half years in the world as a secretary, I have finally decided on my future.

I have been praying very hard for the last six months to a year, and it has finally come to light. I am very much interested in being a Nun in your Community. I am 21 years old at the present, and would like to know when I may be admitted and what I must do. I have known other girls who have gone in August, but I wondered if this is the only time to begin, or if you have other times during the year for admitting new girls.

Also, with my schooling and working the two and a half years as I have, where would I start when I was admitted? Is it right, that I would be in school for a year as a postulant and then be admitted as a novice? Please inform me. Another question. Do you suggest to the girl the fields they are most needed in, or would I have a choice according to my ability?

These are two of the many questions in my mind and I would appreciate your kind advice and information. May I hear from you in the near future?

*Sincerely yours,
Barbara Keller*

The following letter of recommendation from Barbara's Pastor, dated March 8, 1957 was sent to Mother Edna:

The Dr. Wm. G. Keller Family have family members who are Priests or Sisters. One niece, Sister Camilla Wolfram, is in your Convent. They are a pretty good family, in fact, none better! Now their daughter, Barbara Ann, begs for admittance to your Convent. It affords me great joy to recommend her, for she is indeed a fine girl.

*May Our Blessed Mother and St. Therese ever bless and direct her in her beautiful calling.
Father Hauch*

Barbara was accepted and entered the Postulancy of Holy Family Convent on August 25, 1957. Barbara was given the name, Sister Mary Stephen, when she was received into the Novitiate on June 13, 1958. Sister Mary Stephen attended Holy Family College earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree on May 17, 1971 with a Major in Elementary Teaching and a Minor in Liturgical Music.

Sister Mary Stephen lived her life, motivated by the following quote: "Follow me, drop everything that you think is important in your life – family, security and personal ambitions – and I will show you what really counts." Sister Mary Stephen was grateful for the opportunity to earn a College Degree. She used her teaching and administrative skills for 20 years in Wisconsin Catholic Schools. In 1980 she was assigned to use her secretarial skills for the next five years at Silver Lake College of the Holy Family in the Financial Aid Office. She served in various Community Services and returned to the College to serve as the Education Secretary for 14 years. As her health declined, Sister Mary Stephen became a resident in St. Rita Health Center in the fall of 2018. There she continued to be faithful to her Prayer Apostolate of praying for the Green Bay Ministries. Sister Mary Stephen participated in Christ's work of redemption through her daily prayer, enduring her suffering day-by-day.

At the time of her Jubilee, Sister Mary Stephen wrote, "Persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus." This is what Sister Mary Stephen lived. She did not always run, especially in her later years of life, but she was ever grateful for family, Community, friends and the invitation of the Lord to 'Come and See.' On Tuesday morning, June, 13, 65 years after she was received as a member of the Community, Jesus invited Sister Mary Stephen to 'Come and See' and took her home. Thank you, Sister Mary Stephen for responding to God's call in 1957 to 'Come and See'. Thank you for being our Sister, a Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity.

Eternal life grant to Sister Mary Stephen O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her.
May she rest in peace. Amen