



Sr. Francis de Sales Heffernan

February 12, 1914 – June 9, 2010

Sr. Francis de Sales Heffernan (96) died on Wednesday, June 9, 2010, at Mohun Health Care Center, Columbus, Ohio, in her 75th year of religious profession. She served her Dominican Sisters as General Councilor (1959-61), Mother General (1961-74), and Prioress of the Motherhouse (1984-97). She also was the President of Albertus Magnus College, New Haven, CT (1974-82), having served the institution previously as a faculty member, Dean of Students, and Dean of Academics (1941-54).

She was born in New Haven, Connecticut, on February 12, 1914. Patrick and Hannah (Condon) Heffernan baptized their eldest as “Anna Elizabeth,” but, proud of his new citizenship and the fact that his daughter was born on Abraham Lincoln’s birthday, her father legally named her “Anna Lincoln Heffernan.” She entered the Novitiate of the former Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs in 1933, and in 1935 she made her Profession of Vows as Sr. Francis de Sales.

She received a BA from St. Mary of the Springs College (now Ohio Dominican University) in Latin and French, earned an MA in Latin from The Ohio State University, and did additional graduate work at Yale University. As a young Sister, she taught French, English, and Latin at various high schools in Ohio. While serving on the Council at St. Mary of the Springs, Sr. Francis de Sales ministered as vice principal of Newark (Ohio) Catholic High School until her election as Mother General in 1961. She completed the term of office of her predecessor Mother Aloysie Fitzpatrick, after her untimely death, and was then re-elected for two additional terms.

During her time as Mother General, Sr. Francis de Sales led the congregation through some of the most tumultuous years, weathering changes initiated by Vatican II and making hard decisions regarding the closing of some missions, the founding of others, and the building of a new Motherhouse. It was during her term in office that the number of Sisters in the congregation’s history would peak (735 in 1967) and then diminish, partly because of the departure of a significant number of members in the wake of the changes that followed Vatican II. Under her leadership, numerous school buildings and programs were expanded, missions were established in Peru and Puerto Rico, a new facility for the St. George Hospital in Cincinnati was built, Nazareth Towers (a HUD housing project for seniors in Columbus) was collaboratively planned and founded, the vacation property Dominican Acres was instituted, the congregation began enrolling in Social Security, and Sisters began new ministries in previously uncharted areas.

Sr. Francis de Sales was the last major superior of the congregation to have the title “Mother,” but no other term could describe as well the care with which she navigated the rough waters of change and upheaval. Her nurturing, pastoral ways and her genuine concern for and appreciation of individuals were ever-present; she had a gentle strength amid firm resolve. She showed the same care and respect to all individuals whether visiting with a Sister or meeting with bishops and cardinals.

After her final term as Mother General, Sr. Francis de Sales went on to serve as President at Albertus Magnus College from 1974 to 1982, entering another challenging atmosphere, with student upheaval and dire financial straits. While the budget deficit stood at \$900,000 when she assumed office, the school operated in the black for seven of her eight years at the helm. This was accomplished while expanding programs and facilities: she instituted long-range planning, brought the first computers to several of the administrative and academic offices, established academic development and counseling centers, and oversaw renovation projects, among other accomplishments.

Returning to Columbus in 1982, Sr. Francis de Sales assumed another leadership role in the congregation, this time as Motherhouse Prioress from 1984 to 1997. Then serving in various volunteer roles, she retired to Mohun Health Care Center in 2003 and entered a ministry of prayer.

Sr. Francis de Sales served on numerous boards and advisory councils in her lifetime, holding leadership roles in many, including the Dominican Leadership Conference (DLC) and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). She was particularly proud of her work over a seven-year period serving on the State of Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority (CHEFA), which funded hospitals and colleges through bond issues. Among her many honors and awards were two honorary doctorate degrees – one from Ohio Dominican College (now Ohio Dominican University) and the other from Providence College in Rhode Island.

Sr. Francis de Sales was preceded in death by her parents; her brothers John, Edward, Thomas, and Gerald; and her sister Mary (a Sister of Charity). She is survived by a sister-in-law, Ellie Heffernan; a cousin, Margaret Golden; and many other cousins, nieces, and nephews.

The wake will be held on Friday, June 11, at 3pm at the Columbus Motherhouse. Evening Prayer and a Vigil of Remembrance will begin at 5pm. The funeral Mass will be held on Saturday, June 12, at 9am at the Columbus Motherhouse. Burial will follow at St. Joseph's Cemetery.

Memorial gifts in Sr. Francis de Sales' memory may be sent to Dominican Sisters of Peace, 2320 Airport Drive, Columbus, OH 43219-2098.