

Remembering Sister Frances Ryan

1929 - 2020

*“Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?”*



“My work is loving the world...”

Am I no longer young and still not half-perfect?

Let me keep my mind on what matters,

which is my work,

*which is mostly standing still and learning to
be astonished.”*

~ Mary Oliver



*“our oneness in Christ extends
beyond this life,
the bond of community
unites us even after death”
(Const. #59/d.31)*

Sisters, family members and friends of Sister Frances Ryan were finally able to gather at the table of the Eucharist on Wednesday, July 15 to celebrate her life. The gathering was held at the Blessed Sacrament site of the Catholic Family of Parishes in Chatham. Everyone was warmly and graciously welcomed by the staff of Blessed Sacrament. Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, numbers were limited and seating arrangements and other protocols were carefully followed.

Father Michael Ryan and Father Jim Higgins, the pastor of the Catholic Family of Parishes, concelebrated with Father Dikran. Although the congregation was not able to join in the singing, beautiful music was provided by Cindy Waddick and Michelle O'Rourke, longstanding friends of Frances and of the Ursulines. Matt Sterling, a recent graduate of Ursuline College, generously provided his skills so that the service could be livestreamed.

Sister Sheila welcomed the congregation including those who were livestreaming the Mass and others who were present in spirit. In her opening reflection, Sheila used the image of fire to illustrate the various aspects of Frances's life. The fire in the bones and in the heart mentioned in the first reading from the Prophet Jeremiah was the fire that impelled Frances in her many social justice endeavours. The fire of the hearth illustrated her warm and loving relationships with her family, her sisters in community, her students and co-workers. The fire of the burning bush referred to Frances's sense of wonder and appreciation of the beauties and mysteries of creation. Finally, the consuming fire spoken of by the desert mothers and fathers imaged Frances's final letting go into God as she became the flame.

Father Dikran, the presider of the celebration, continued the meditation on fire and light in his homily, speaking of Frances's passion which originated with God. He described Frances as a shining flame for God's glory, a woman who came to understand the importance of being with God and of opening herself completely to God's love. Now, he reminded us, it is our responsibility to be the fire-bearers, to let God's work be done in us and through us.

At the end of the Mass, Sister Theresa Campeau processed from the church carrying the urn. The prayers at the graveside were led by Sister Noreen Allossery-Walsh and the crucifix was presented to Maureen Sheehan as a reminder of the enduring connection between the Ryans and the Ursulines. Sister Frances's cremains were buried with the body of her dear friend, Sister Margaret Pray.

A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to
the Philippians

My deep desire and hope is that I shall
never fail in my duty, but that at all times,
and especially just now, I shall be full of
courage, so that with my whole being I
shall bring honour to Christ whether I
live or die. For what is life? To me, it is
Christ; death then, will bring more.

The Word of the Lord