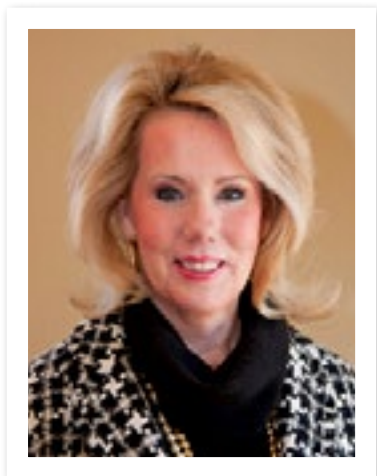




# Priestly People

SERVANTS OF THE PARACLETE

May 2019 - Vol. 35 No. 5



## *Memories of Michele*

**January 18, 1950 ~ December 30, 2018**

On the parking lot of St. Michael's Center, in Sunset Hills, a suburb of St. Louis, I found myself walking behind an elegantly dressed woman. She heard my footsteps, turned and greeted me. That encounter developed into a personal and professional relationship that was to last over thirty years. I call it the "Irish" connection. Michele McGrath had an abiding interest in Ireland, its history, culture, music and literature.

About twenty-five years later, again in a parking lot, as Michele closed the door of her car, without a greeting but an incredulous expression on her face, she inquired "Liam, how could you leave such a beautiful island". She and her sisters had just returned from a wonderful trip to Ireland where they had returned to their "Irish roots" and saw people who "looked just like them"!

My memories of Michele are myriad. We worked together initially for six years, and later again for almost ten years. After her family, I was privy to her initial diagnosis which four years later would take her from us. Her Catholic faith was her inner compass;

her devotion to the Mother of God was filial and confident. During the saga of her lengthy illness, when she thought that the end of life was near and rebounded back, she stated, "I guess that God does not want me yet." She was not afraid of death, shared her liturgical funeral plans, wanted family, friends, servants of the Paraclete, residents and staff to be together during the funeral liturgy.

Michele's experiences of working in and with the ministry of the servants of the Paraclete gave her a unique perspective of the mercy of God. She considered it one of the greatest privileges of her faith life to be involved in the healing process of priests and brothers. The crowning moment for her loyalty and service was the invitation to become an Oblate of the servants of the Paraclete. Whereby, she ratified her commitment to the mission and charism of the Congregation. Michele could be found with the Vianney community in private and public prayer. She attended Mass, participated in seasonal liturgical celebrations, and came to the funerals of the servants

and residents in her service, affection and bonding with Vianney life cycles.

The province of her clinical acuity was far ranging. She was extraordinarily well read as a clinician. She brought unexpected astute insights to staff review meetings and conversations. Her clients admired, respected and held her in great affection; appreciating her personal yet challenging style of the therapeutic process.

On occasions after a long day of clinical counseling sessions she would visit with me and review facts and features of her sessions. I was humbled by her genuine interest in my opinions and comments. Her affirmation skills were a part of her personality and faith system. At times her concerns regarding the mental status of her clients would cause her to request my vigilance regarding their stability and wellbeing. Bishops and Provincials were attentive to her as she gave feedback recommendations. One could observe her preparation and self confidence in her reporting and written reports.

Michele's knowledge of psycho pharmacological medications was awesome. She often called physicians regarding medications prescribed by them for her clients, questioning the dosage, side effects, or necessity. She maintained that interest throughout her professional career.

As I write more images and memories come to mind. Once, when with a friend, we were ascending an elevator in the Nieman Marcus department store when I saw Michele. There she was whirling a clothes rack with one hand and the other laden with garments. She will be for me always elegant and in style.

She enjoyed Mexican food and our kitchen staff and sometimes her clients would say, "save a plate for Michele." Michele, while working late, would enjoy her supper with the residents. They enjoyed her charm and easement with them.

During the spring and summer months Michele would visit Vianney on Saturdays and do some planting and gardening, sometimes bringing her dog "Dickens" with her to the enjoyment of the residents.

I can also testify to her generosity to the servants of the Paraclete community at Christmas - gifts galore.

She gifted the residents with well-chosen Christmas edibles that would last and last.

When she learned of the project that a set of the Stations of the Cross would be erected on a pathway on the grounds, she offered anonymously to defray the cost of the materials and labor. She wanted them dedicated to the memory of her friend and colleague Fr. Joseph McNamara sP, hence the inscription on the dedication plaque.

Michele enjoyed recounting the episodes of Fr. McNamara offering a weekly loaf of wholegrain bread to the women on staff which he had baked. It transpired that the group began sharing homemade bread recipes during staff meetings, impacting on the patient staff meeting schedule, and was later modified. The laughter on those occasions can only be imagined. With regularity Michele, could be found attending the community Mass. She also could be found alone in the chapel in private prayer/meditation.

One of her greatest spiritual joys was being invited to become an Oblate of the servants of the Paraclete. She prepared personally through researching the meaning of the word Oblate and its obligations. Likewise, she prayerfully prepared for the brief ceremony of her integration as an Oblate, thus bonding with the membership of the Congregation in its unique spirituality, mission and charism.

When she understood the terminal implications and consequences of her illness, she shared that she was not afraid to die and was grateful to God for "giving me notice, plus a boarding pass with no flight departure time yet."

Last June she invited Chris and me for lunch to one of her favorite restaurants. At that time she was quite ill and used a walker. During the meal Chris excused himself. Resulting in the following conversation, she asked me, "Liam, how is my hair." I replied, "Michele, "it has not moved, you're lovely to look at, delightful to know, and easy on the eyes .... your hair is fine." She smilingly, added, "You're full of blarney."

The word friendship can connote length of time and depth of meaning regarding its significance. I have in the past given thanks to God for the gift of

the presence of Michele McGrath in my personal and ministerial life. She was a part of it for a reason, numerous seasons, and in a way a lifetime. I was filled with sadness and, yes, gratitude when she died. Her life is not over, it is just changed. She took a jet flight to her home in heaven and continues to love and affirm all those whose lives she touched.

Liam Hoare sP

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My Aunt Michele

She was beautiful inside and out. She looked like a movie star and smelled like flowers. I treasured the time with her. She always made you feel loved.

I remember the first time she let me sit at her dressing table. I felt so special. She would take me shopping for dresses and let me borrow her jewelry and purses for high school dances. If there was anything she had that she thought I needed she would instantly put it on me. She was always giving.

I thought it was the clothes but really it was her delight in seeing me look my best which made me feel beautiful. In gently fixing my hair or finding the right pair of earrings. She would almost squeal with delight “ooh I love it.” I felt so adored. In my adolescent and teenage years this love was formative. She practically built my self-esteem.

Later in life when there were no more real occasions to dress me she would dress my heart with the same loving care. Listening to my woes about work or relationships and then gently providing advice usually by way of sharing an experience she had. When I was worried about living alone she told me I could do it, she had. She told me to focus on work, learn how to support myself, and to wait for the right guy. She had and her prince did come along in Rick. He was more handsome and wonderful than she could have ever imagined.

Throughout her battle with cancer she showed such grace, strength and beauty. She dove right into it with no fear just the desire to do everything she had ever wanted. And love us all even more while she could. I would call to ask how she was doing and then somehow end up talking about myself because she was so selfless. She never wanted to “waste anytime”

talking about Cancer. “Now tell me about you...” she would say.

What she did was laugh, paint, and give away even more of her purses, jewelry and clothes. She did it all with determination and gusto. She even learned to embrace hair loss which for a lady whose appearance was always impeccable could not have been easy. Nothing was going to bring her down!

This final glimpse of her internal beauty blew me away the most. I’m not especially religious but I think this might be what angels look like. I’m so glad she is with them now and with her beloved family members. I will miss her so much.

Sarah von Pollaro

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Dr. Michelle McGrath, sP/Oblate, was a woman graced with deep faith. Her gentle spirit and personable demeanor made her a joy to be around. Even during her physical suffering, she maintained a dignity that allowed her to focus on the ministry to which God called her.

Not too many years before her death Michelle donated a set of outdoor stations of the cross. They adorn a walkway at Vianney Renewal Center that is often used for prayer and meditation. In her life Michelle, like Simon of Cyrene, bore not only her own crosses, but assisted others as they carried their crosses. She faithfully prayed the Liturgy of the Hours and maintained her devotion to Christ in the Eucharist.

May God reward her for her fidelity to the Catholic faith and her perseverance in serving those in need of counseling, accompaniment, direction and support.

The Servants of the Paraclete will always honor her memory and cherish her time with us.

+Rest in Peace!” Amen.

David T. Fitzgerald sP

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Many thanks to God and to Dr. Michelle McGrath for the many years of dedicated service she has given to the ministry of the Servants of the Paraclete in Missouri. She has combined in a very healthy and healing way her experience and expertise in

psychotherapy with a deep child-like faith and spiritual life. She has integrated and brought to completion all she has done for Paraclete ministry in a wonderful way by becoming an Oblate of the Servants of the Paraclete, offering herself and her life to God.

Peter Lechner sP



I have known Michele for 22 years. When I first came to St. Michael's in Sunset Hills, she was not my primary therapist, but I was in her skills group class. Whenever someone new started their first day in that group, Michele would ask if you liked paper or plastic, if you liked cats or dogs, and what was your favorite color. I don't know if there were any psychological interpretations to one's answers, but for me it eased my uneasiness in starting the program.

I remember one of her New Year's resolutions was to better accessorize her wardrobe. I think that was her resolution almost every year. She had beautiful jewelry and her shoes were most unique.

Michele was known for her fashion style and many a female staff member would get some of her clothes and shoes when she would clean out her closets. She would also bring some of Rick's clothes to pass along to use, but his style was not quite as unique as Michele's.

Speaking of fashion, there is a point in therapy where you start liking your therapist and maybe even trying to bribe him or her so one would look for a small gift to give. One day I was at Sak's 5th Avenue in the Plaza Frontenac Shopping Center and I noticed on the counter something like a coin purse or key bag and I thought Michele might like it. It was a "Burberry" item and when I picked it up and looked at the price tag it was \$150.00. I put it back down thinking one has to remember boundaries when interacting with a therapist.

I always thought Michele's hair was her "signature look"! It was beautifully styled but when she started radiation and chemotherapy, gradually that beautiful hair began falling out. And then when she had brain surgery, you could see the surgery scars in her scalp. I was so impressed with her bearing the loss of her

hair. She would at times wear a wig, not hiding her imperfections as she did not hide her illness.

Michele would talk about her family dynamic and one time I told her that she reminded me of my oldest sister, Mary Therese. That reminder would happen when Michele would be upset with me about something. I was afraid of my sister when I was growing up and whenever Michele got upset with me – those feelings of my childhood would return.

Thankfully she did not get put out with me very often but she did tell me that her sisters Kathy, Pam and Teresa would pull her hair and push her around when they were younger! Of course they denied ever doing that to her, but Michele said that she had the bruises to prove it happened. Sibling rivalry.

Michele also told the story about her uncle Edward or EG and his friend, Patrick Dennis, who spent a summer at her grandmother's house. The play "Auntie Mame" was written from that summer experience by Patrick Dennis. Her grandmother must have been quite a character.

Other family dynamics included the tornado warnings in Sedalia. Most families would head to the basement or cellar but not the McGrath's. They would go to the bank vault for safety. Speaking of the bank, the McGrath family owned a bank in Sedalia and Michele was supposed to be a Michael, so that she could take over the family business – the bank!

Several weeks ago three kittens appeared on our grounds and one of them had the color of Michele's hair. So I decided to call her Michele, thinking that the kitten was a female. Well one of our residents told me that Michele was a Michael. When I would visit with Michele's husband, Rick, he told me Michele's nickname when she was growing up was "Micki" – so now I have renamed the kitten Micki in memory of Michele.

There is a lot more I would like to say, many more memories. I envied the way she prayed, in how she quietly would talk to God. I will miss her so much for she was a good therapist, a good teacher, a good family member and a wonderful friend. I am so grateful that I was a part of her life.

Fr. Chris

## SHOES!

After visiting Michele at home one day, she asked me to take a bag of shoes. “I will not need these, so if you know someone that could use them, please give them the shoes”. Do I know someone who could benefit from this large bag of shoes - size 8, skinny width and a myriad of colors and trim! The shoes found new homes, but I will always remember how resolute and profound she was about her illness and impending end of life. Rest in Peace Michele!



Marian Wolaver



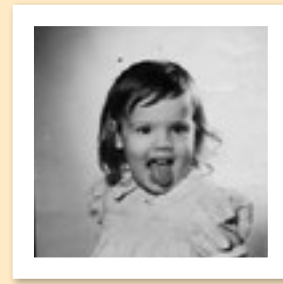
## VISITING NEW MEXICO – SERVANTS OF THE PARACLETE FOUNDATION

Michele visited New Mexico as part of the Servants of the Paraclete delegation to an annual conference with professionals who represented treatment centers across the Americas. The conference was held at the original foundation of the Servants of the Paraclete in Jemez Springs NM.

The congregation was founded in the canyons of the Jemez Mountains; the serenity and glorious colors of the cliffs and buttes impacted Michele as she wandered the grounds and surrounding areas of where the ministry she was so committed and dedicated to had its beginnings. She sensed the sacredness.

She was so grateful for the opportunity to visit Jemez Springs!

Marian Wolaver



Michele our sister,

Although she was patient in death, in her life she was sometimes impatient.

As a child on the endless drives to the Lake of the Ozarks, she would plaintively query, “How many miles to the rock pile?”

When it was time for her to go to afternoon kindergarten, she would tune up with her infamous tummy ache. Because Mama was such a soft touch, she missed more kindergarten than she attended.

As the baby of the family, Michele was something of a princess. We would trundle her about in our doll baby carriage, acquiescing to her every command.

Despite her royal demeanor, she was very athletic, excelling in golf, cheerleading, volleyball, swimming, etc.

She made friendships which lasted for a lifetime. We will miss her energy, her dry sense of humor and her ability to see the bright side of most situations.

We love you and you’ll never be forgotten.

Kathe, Pam and Teresa



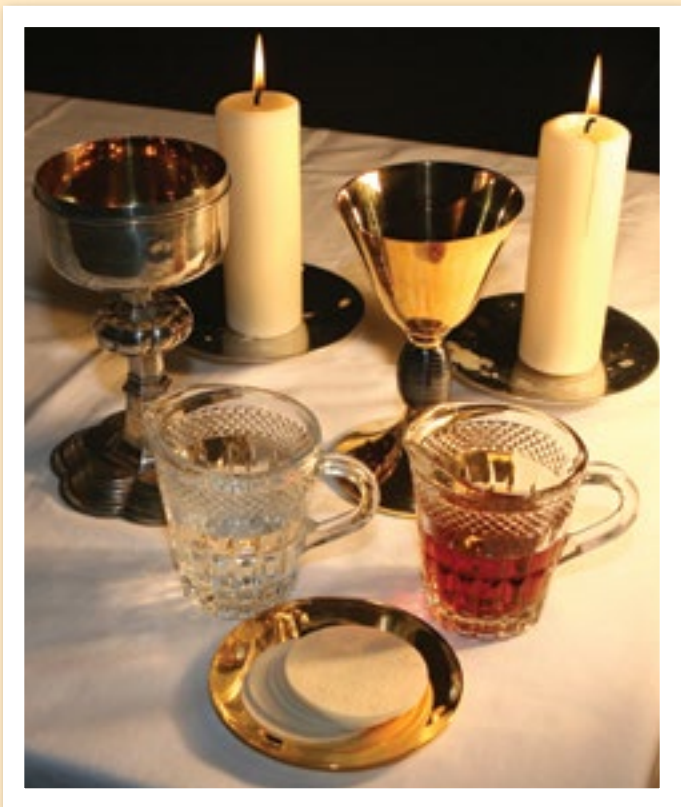


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### Thank you for supporting our Mass Stipend Ministry!

Name of the person to be remembered in a mass celebrated by a Servant of the Paraclete

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Please send an acknowledgement card on my behalf to:

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You will receive acknowledgement of the mass stipend donation in your donor thank you letter. No need to send an acknowledgement card to yourself if you are the donor.

Please complete the mass stipend form and return to the Servants of the Paraclete Development Office.

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