

Sister Cecilia Charles Flanagan



Sister Ceil (top left) and friends at Saint Anne Villa

When first introduced to Sister Cecilia Charles Flanagan, you are sure to notice her brilliantly vivid blue eyes. These “Irish eyes” always seem to be twinkling, transforming her face into a perpetual smile. Sister Ceil’s smile is constantly evident as she interacts with the sisters residing in Saint Anne Villa, including the elderly sisters now living with dementia. The smile and the loving heart behind the smile radiate God’s love and charity to all who are blessed to cross her path.

Sister Ceil’s ministry as a Sister of Charity is rooted upon her upbringing in a loving Irish-American family. Her parents valued Catholic education, and Ceil and her three older brothers were taught by Sisters of Charity at Saint Thomas the Apostle School in Bloomfield, NJ. She admired the Sisters and was especially influenced by her eighth grade teacher, Sister Anita James, and the way that Sister Anita lived her religious life. When Ceil continued on to attend Mount Saint Dominic’s High School in Caldwell, Sister Anita remained her mentor. Two years after graduating from high school, Ceil came to see what Sister Anita had known for years: Ceil had a calling to be a Sister of Charity.

Ceil joined the Sisters of Charity on August 20, 1959. As a Sister of Charity, Sister Ceil has devoted her ministry to serving the elderly, particularly persons with dementia. As a young sister, she worked with elderly sisters at Saint Anne Villa for fifteen years before moving on to do similar work at Saint Vincent Hospital in Montclair, Cedar Grove Convalescent Center in Cedar Grove, and Pleasantview Manor in Vauxhall, NJ. She was delighted to return to Saint Anne Villa twenty years ago.

Sister Ceil loves her ministry at Saint Anne Villa. She plans activities, assists at parties and events, takes residents on outings, and generally jumps in to make each day a little brighter for the sisters who so enjoy her presence. She works five full days a week, including evenings and

some weekends as needed. Though she doesn't need to arrive at work until 8:30 a.m., she gets to the Villa at 7:30 so she has time to prepare for the day, make "the rounds" of the sisters' rooms, and visit with the sisters at breakfast. She says, "I've got my morning routine. I deliver the newspapers. I go around to everyone's room and wake them up and cheerfully say, 'Good morning, how are you?' I just enjoy what I'm doing!"

Part of the morning routine is posting a calendar with the date, the day of the week, and the weather for the day. "I tell the sisters that if the weather isn't sunny, that just means that we have to make our own sunshine."

Each day, Sister Ceil goes from room to room with a wagon loaded with games, books, and other stimulating items. Her games, puzzles, stories, and jokes brighten the morning for all those she visits. She says, "I enjoy working with the elderly. I relate to their reality, but I also do a lot of teaching. And I learn from them." She observes, "I know that the sisters are glad that I'm here and that they watch for me to visit them. I tell them all my crazy jokes and stories. I guess I'm made to be in this place!"

Depending on the day, activities may include "Name that Tune," pet therapy, tai chi classes and other classes, various outings and parties. Sister Ceil is particularly known for the way that she encourages the sisters at the Villa to have fun at parties. "They say it's not a party if I'm not there." As she dances and sings, her joy is contagious.

Sister Ceil expects that she will continue to work with the elderly at Saint Anne Villa for years to come. "I'll continue in this as long as I can keep going. I know how much it means." She appreciates that Saint Anne Villa is a very special place, and she is truly grateful to all the people who support the Villa with their prayers and gifts. "These sisters have given so much for their whole lives. They deserve to live in a nice place and I want them to be happy."

As Sister Ceil points out the clean, bright and spacious rooms of the nursing care residents, she stops to greet a sister who is moving down the hall on a wheelchair. She leans in so that the sister can see her clearly, and with her ever present smile teases, "Say how wonderful I am!" The elderly sister, along with everyone else at Saint Villa Anne, actually needs no prompting to confirm, "You **are** wonderful, Sister!"