

Sister Mary Lou Hayden, SC

Entered eternal life on February 14, 2025



It was providential that God called Sr. Mary Lou Hayden home on Valentine's Day, for like the Little Flower, her vocation **was** love. Mary Lou didn't just talk about love—she lived it every single day. She embodied the very essence of Saint Paul's beautiful description of love in his letter to the Corinthians: She was patient; she was kind; she was humble and she was never boastful. She was never self-seeking, never easily angered. Through every challenge...she trusted, she hoped, and she persevered. Mary Lou's love was steadfast, unconditional and a beacon of light shone out from this little sister to impact so many people in a profound way. Her impact was gigantic!

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton said, "What is in the way is the way." And Mary Lou, with her unwavering faith and strength, lived this truth with grace. For decades, she battled poor health, but never once did it define her. Rather, it strengthened her resolve and deepened her commitment to

her calling. Jersey City and Mary Lou were synonymous. She was not just from Jersey City, she *belonged* to it and it *belonged* to her—her heart and spirit intertwined with the city she loved. She breathed in the spirit of this city and exhaled the love of Jesus to all who crossed her path in her own quiet way. Jersey City and Sr. Mary Lou were at one with each other and she expressed that she never wanted to leave there and God took care of that for her on Valentine's Day – the perfect day. She poured herself out for the people of God, living a life of service with passion, joy, and devotion.

Even when faced with tremendous physical challenges, Mary Lou showed a courage that could only come from a heart that trusted deeply in God's plan for her. Just months ago, despite having broken four ribs a few days before, she insisted on attending the funeral of her dear friend, Fr. Francis Schiller. It was only after the service that she mentioned her fall and went to a doctor. She never sought attention for her own struggles—she was always more focused on others. Like our community symbol, the pelican, she gave totally and unreservedly from her substance. She was 100% a Sister of Charity 100% of the time. The gift of herself that kept on giving, came from the deepest well of her soul, a well nourished by her consistent prayer and devotion. This spiritual wellspring was the fuel for her living her whole life with boundless charity. Her inner fire of love fed the multitudes.

I often joked that if the Lafayette Section had an election for mayor, Sr. Mary Lou would have been elected in a landslide. Every time we stepped outside, someone would call her name, reminding her of how she had touched their lives - "Sr. Mary Lou! Remember me?" or "Thank you, Sr. Mary Lou, my life has changed for the better!" If you could examine the sidewalks of Lafayette, you'd certainly see her footprints, and even more importantly, her heart prints imbedded there. I am sure that her love will radiate there forever.

Sr. Mary Lou had a gift for forming deep, meaningful connections. Her sister Marge and her brother Eddie's family meant everything to her. She traveled to Cherry Hill to visit her nephews Bob and Thomas. She had a special bond with Bob's wife Dana and became grandmother to their children in the absence of their own. Mary Lou loved visiting her brother Eddie's children and family in the Mid- West - Mary, Ginger, Rita and George and they loved having her. She was incredibly proud of her aunt, Sr. Margaret De Paul who died in 1965 and her sister, Sr. Jude Miriam, who died in 1975, both Sisters of Charity. Their shared vocation was a source of deep joy and pride for her. Her love for her family was matched by the deep love she received in return from them. They treated their matriarch like a queen.

Sr. Mary Lou shared a special love with her lifelong friend and band member, Sr. Mary Jo Ward. They supported each other in their sickness right up to the last days with daily phone conversations. Her relationship

with neighbors, teachers and parishioners, particularly the Jones Family and the Dawkins Family was deep and long standing. Mary Lou had a special place in her heart for immigrants. She assisted many teachers including myself and Sr. Noreen, to become legal immigrants. She was especially kind to my family when they visited All Saints and they cherish lots of good memories with Sr. Mary Lou.

She also kept in touch with so many people that she met along the way, including her dear friend Nicole Giroux in California, Marianna Ajemain in New York, Pat Abernathy, the Bailens and the Monks. She maintained consistent contact with them making sure that their shared stories were fed with love. Mary Lou developed a tight bond of 49 years with Miss Freda Grant, the manager of Provident Bank on Communipaw Avenue. On Wednesday, February 12th, Mary Lou told me to order flowers for her on the occasion of Miss Grant's retirement. On Valentines Day, she called to say that she had received the flowers -not knowing that her lifelong friend had gone home to God. It was a beautiful, poignant example of love meeting love in the most unexpected way.

It was her connection with Sr. Maeve that was truly remarkable. Every Friday, without fail, no matter how she was feeling, Mary Lou visited Maeve at Complete Care at Saint Vincent's. I had the privilege of witnessing the depth of their friendship, and what a profound gift it was. It was a relationship that transcended words — a glance, a touch, an unspoken understanding that spoke volumes was sometimes all that they could give each other. It was in these moments that I saw what true friendship looks like. And I was blessed to be welcomed into their circle to experience how bonds of love and compassion can never be broken. I will treasure the life lessons and the love lessons that I learned from them. Maeve's Family enfolded Mary Lou into their family keeping in constant contact, celebrating her birthday and sending care packages often to her.

Together, Mary Lou and Maeve were a dynamic force in their ministry at Saint Patrick and Assumption All Saints schools and parishes. They formed a leadership model that was way before their time. They tapped into each other's unique gifts, creating miracles in the lives of so many students, teachers and parishioners. Alongside Fr. Gene Squeo and Fr. Francis Schiller and more recently Fr. Marc-Arthur Francois, they formed what can be lovingly called the "Jersey City Dream Team"— a group whose impact can never be measured but will continue to ripple through generations to come.

Mary Lou's life was, in every way, a living testament to love in action. She didn't just speak of love—she *was* love. She lived it, and in doing so, she left an indelible mark on the hearts of all who were fortunate enough to know her. Though she is no longer physically with us, her legacy of faith, kindness, and unconditional love will continue to inspire us all. There is a plaque at Complete Care at Saint Vincent's with a quote from Saint Vincent De Paul that reads, "If God is the center of your life, no words will be needed. Your mere presence will touch their hearts." Mary Lou's presence touched the hearts of thousands, and her love has extended to every corner of the world.

Rest easy now, my dear friend. We will carry your spirit with us, and we will continue to call on you for guidance and intercession as we strive to live lives filled with the same charitable zeal and love that you embodied so beautifully.

Sister Noreen Holly, SC and
Sister Agatha Mathangani, SC