

# Mercy nuns who are siblings celebrate life, decades of ministry

PITTSBURGH – They grew up with each other in Pittsburgh. They played and prayed together. They even got into the same line of work.

Mercy Sisters Mary de Lellis Laboon, 90, Rosemary Laboon, 83, and Joan Laboon, 81, gathered recently at the Convent of Mercy in Pittsburgh to reflect on their decades of service to the church.

“It’s nice to say, ‘These are my sisters,’” said Sister de Lellis, seated in a wheelchair and smiling at her sisters around her at a table in a comfortable living room.

She celebrated her 90th birthday in November with her sisters at her side.

“We’re all very close,” said Sister Joan. She asked the interviewer to speak loudly as her sisters had difficulty hearing.

The trio can account for a total of 202 years of religious life serving in ministries that included education, health care and parish work.

“Dad was always proud that there were three nuns in the family,” Sister Rosemary said.

Sister de Lellis responded, “I never heard him say that.”

“He did,” Sisters Rosemary and Joan agreed in unison.

Occasionally, the sisters, during the interview, would politely disagree with each other over different versions of facts.

They came from a family of nine and talked proudly of their two brothers, both of whom became priests.

Father Joseph Laboon, who celebrated Sister de Lellis’ birthday Mass, served the Diocese of Pittsburgh before retiring to Florida. Father John Laboon, now deceased,

was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his heroic submarine service in World War II. After the war, he became a Jesuit priest and U.S. Navy chaplain serving in Vietnam. In fact, the U.S. Navy named a guided missile destroyer after him: the USS Laboon.

"I christened it," said Sister Rosemary, her eyes wide with excitement as she recalled the event in 1993 in Bath, Maine.

Youthful memories included a nightly family rosary following supper, Mass on Sundays and daily Mass attendance during Lent. Sister de Lellis often looked after the younger children and would walk them to Mass.

The example of sisters who taught them in school led them to consider religious life. Sister de Lellis wanted to be a sister from an early age. Sisters Rosemary and Joan said they loved being around the sisters and often helped them after school.

Sister de Lellis, who entered the order in 1937, quietly chuckled as she told of her reaction when she received her first assignment.

"The only thing I didn't want to do was teach," she said.

But her sewing skills led to an assignment as a home economics teacher at Carlow College (now Carlow University). Years later she became a parish secretary, then ministered to oncology patients at Pittsburgh's Mercy Hospital (now UMPC Mercy) and was a parish social minister. Sister de Lellis returned to the Convent of Mercy in 1990.

Sister Rosemary entered in 1943 and spent 40 years teaching in Catholic elementary schools. Retired NFL quarterback Dan Marino was one of her students when she taught fifth grade at St. Regis School in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood. She recalled seeing Marino playing catch with a football in the street with his father.

"I used to think, 'I wish he was home doing his homework!'" she said, laughing.

She became a parish social minister, taking Communion to shut-ins, distributing food to the poor and helping plan funeral liturgies.

"I liked to hear people's stories; many times they had no one to talk with them," she

said.

Later, she was housemother at Mercy House, where families of patients at Mercy Hospital would stay overnight. She volunteered in the hospital's gift shop and today works 20 hours a week in medical records.

Sister Joan entered in 1945 and taught in Catholic elementary schools in the Pittsburgh area, then spent four years as assistant superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Returning home in 1971, she was a vice principal and later principal at Bishop Boyle High School in Homestead. She worked in admissions at Carlow and oversaw volunteers at Mercy Hospital. She also volunteered in the hospital's gift shop. Today, she works on special projects at UPMC Mercy.

"It's been great. I have loved everything that I have done," she said.

These days, the siblings meet at the Convent of Mercy every Sunday for lunch and card games.

"Except when the Steelers are on," said Sister Joan. Of course, they watch the game - together.