

SISTER ELLEN MARY LOPEZ

Entered eternal life on May 14, 2025

at the age of 88
after 69 years of religious life

Remembering:

Friday, May 16, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.
Marywood - Chapel of the Word

Mass of Christian Burial:

Friday, May 16, 2025, at 10:30 a.m.
Marywood – Chapel of the Word



We commend Sister Ellen Mary to your prayers.

Born in Seguin, Texas, March 10, 1937, Sister Ellen Mary Lopez treasured her Hispanic heritage and was happy to spend the last decades of her apostolate ministering to the Mexican American community. Mary Lopez was one of nine children of Alejo and Socorro Barron Lopez, originally from Mexico. Before Mary was of school age, the family moved to Saginaw, Michigan, where she attended Potter School and Saginaw Central Junior and High Schools. In the 3rd as well as the 11th and 12th grades, she attended St. Joseph School, where she met the Grand Rapids Dominicans. She already knew something about the community through her older sister, Phyllis, who had entered two years prior to Mary who followed her sister and became Sister Ellen Mary of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

For the first fourteen years of ministry, Sr. Ellen Mary served in the area of the domestic arts as housekeeper and food service director in Pewamo, Carson City, Essexville, East Tawas, Grand Rapids, and Saginaw. She enjoyed this ministry but increasingly felt a call to further her education and to teach. That hope became a reality when she was assigned to study at Aquinas College where she completed a BA in Religious Studies and Spanish.

Continuing her education over the years, Sister Ellen Mary earned certificates at Little Falls, Minnesota; Siena Heights, Adrian, Michigan; and Clinical Pastoral Education at Covenant Hospital in Saginaw. Furthermore, she earned certification in Hispanic ministry through MACC (Mexican American Cultural Center) in San Antonio, Texas, and the Archdiocese of Detroit. Sister studied social work at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, and earned a Certificate in Preaching at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri. In the Saginaw Diocese, she earned a certificate as a Catechist.

In the second phase of her life's work, Sister Ellen Mary served in Pastoral Ministry, Coordinator of Religious Education, and in particular, with the Hispanic community. She found immense joy in this work reflecting: "After thirty years of being away from my culture and language, I was again in the heart of it. Close to my heart were the migrant poor who arrived [each] summer." Sister Ellen Mary led the Pastoral Ministry team for Hispanic people in Gratiot County and served in parishes in Alma, Ithaca, and St. Louis.

Sister Ellen Mary was hired by the Archdiocese of Detroit for Hispanic ministry in Imlay City and other areas in the Thumb of Michigan. There she made St. Clement's in Romeo the center of her activities, where she arranged for a weekly Sunday evening Mass in Spanish, installed a shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, planned worship services, prepared children for first Communion, and taught English as a Second Language for migrant workers. Recognizing the need for training laity to continue the work, she was adamant about preparing adults to continue the work she began in teaching English and providing needed services.

Next, she became Pastoral Associate for Hispanic people at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Grand Rapids. Here she helped with the transition from the small Guadalupe Chapel to the large cathedral for Spanish Masses. In Grand Rapids, she also worked with the ministry to those in need at Steepletown. Through the years, Sister Ellen Mary served many parishes throughout Michigan including Flint, Grand Rapids, and Clio where she was outreach and evangelization minister. In her retirement years at Marywood, she was the Hispanic Outreach Volunteer as well as receptionist, driver for those needing transportation, and a companion. Because she was fluent in both Spanish and English, she was often called upon to translate for hospital workers and/or courts. Wherever she was needed, she was glad to serve.

Her dedication was appreciated by her supervisors, one of whom wrote: "Sister Ellen Mary is enthusiastic about her work, and effective in it . . . Sister's rapport with her volunteers is notable; she has grasped the challenge confronting Hispanic women today and is working effectively to make them a part of their own destiny. She is flexible, and not easily discouraged – both valuable qualities in this ministry."

In 1985 she attended the Third Encuentro, a national convention in Washington, D.C., which addressed the needs of Hispanics in the Church and established projects to meet these needs. She described her dedication as a Dominican Sister as part of a group devoted to helping the suffering, the sick, and the poor.

Sister Ellen Mary was an especially effective lector at Mass - reading with animation and vitality. In a letter to the prioress at the time, Sister Ellen Mary wrote of her thanks for the opportunity to study her Mexican American culture in a formal way. She relished the chance to return to her roots and find, in her words, "the other part of the treasure" of her heritage. First through parents and family and then through religious life, Sister Ellen Mary expressed thanks, "Gracias a Dios for God's continuous presence in my life," she wrote.

And we, in turn, who knew and loved her say, Gracias a Dios for Sister Ellen Mary, who lived and preached God's unconditional love in our lives.

Sr. Ellen Mary is survived by her brother Joe (Mary Alice) Lopez, her sisters Rose Lopez, and Alice Lopez, nieces, nephews, many friends, and members of her Dominican community.