



We commend to your charity the soul of our beloved

Sr. Mary Joan Coultas

Who departed this life on August 2, 2026

In the seventy-third year of her religious life

Birthdate: September 29, 1936 Age: 89 years, 10 months and 5 days

It is with full and grateful hearts, mixed with sadness, that we remember Sister Mary Joan Coultas, who is now wrapped in the arms of Providence.

MaryAnn was the daughter of John Coultas, a chemist and metallurgist, and Margaret Flynn Coultas, a teacher — and in many ways she carried both of them within her: her father's precision, her mother's gift for opening a mind. She entered religious life from Holy Name Parish in Duquesne, and often spoke of Sisters Victorine Verosky, Mary Glenn, and De la Salle Mahler, along with the formation she received at Divine Providence Academy, as the seedbed of her vocation.

Those of us who were formed under her leadership, or simply had the good fortune to sit across a table from her, know that no biography can fully capture Joan. She served as dean of students, and professor of psychology, before becoming president of La Roche College from 1975 to 1981, where she launched the college's first capital campaign and saw the Palumbo Science Center rise from that effort. She was elected Provincial Leader of our Sisters across three terms — 1981 to 1985, 1986 to 1990, and again from 2001 to 2007 — and was a founding member of the steering committee that established Women of Providence in Collaboration in 1982.

Her vision and her judgment were sought well beyond our own community. She served on the Board of Directors of Divine Providence Hospital, the Leadership Pittsburgh steering committee, and the Board of Directors of Union National Corporation, and she lent her voice to the National Catholic Health Association and to the national board of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. From 1990 to 2001 she practiced as a psychotherapist with the Lee Fogarty Group, and from 2007 she coordinated programs at the Kearns Spirituality Center, continuing as a beloved presenter there well into her later years.

Beneath all of it — the offices she held, the boards she served, the counsel she gave — was a single passion that never dimmed: her love for the charism of Providence, and her lifelong determination to make it accessible and known. She had a rare gift for taking what might have remained the private language of a community and opening it outward, so that Providence became something anyone could recognize in the shape of their own life — God's care made visible, sufficient, and near. She was instrumental in our province's participation in the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council, helping us read the signs of the times with courage rather than fear, and trusting that fidelity and change were not opposites but companions. An advocate for change and keenly attentive to the world of politics and public life, she believed the Gospel had something to say in every room she entered, and she was rarely shy about saying it.

Her honors were many — the Distinguished Woman of Pennsylvania Award, the La Roche College Woman of Providence Award, and an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from La Roche, where she remained a trustee

emerita. But if you ask any of us to remember Joan, we will not begin with the honors. We will begin with her Irish wit, her gift for a story that could turn any gathering into something closer to a fireside, and her wide and generous welcome of whoever was in the room. We will remember a problem-solver and a critical thinker to her core — and, more than once, the steady advocate a younger Sister needed: the one who quietly made room at the table, spoke up when it mattered, and believed in her before she quite believed in herself. We will remember an incurable reader who had only to study a table of contents and an introduction to take the full measure of a book — and, having taken it, would press that book on anyone within reach. And we will remember a woman utterly unafraid to give expression to her own spirituality, often rooted in the Celtic imagination she loved — God found in thin places, in water, in the ordinary made luminous.

She had a favorite reflection, one she returned to often as a description of what it meant to lead: *“We live in the midst of tension, not glorifying one position or another, but nonetheless, blessing it by our presence in it.”* It is as fitting a summary of her own life as any of us could write.

Sister Mary Joan is survived by her sister, Joan Bruce (the real Joan); by her Sisters and Associates in the Community; and by countless friends, colleagues, and former students, including her dear friend Sister Agnes Raible. She was cared for with great tenderness in her later years, a gift returned in full for all she had given to us.

Let us give thanks for a life so fully and joyfully given in service of Providence.

Sister Michele Bisbey