

A Simple Gift

by Brigid K. Barry



Elizabeth Heil Leaves a Legacy to Jesuit Missions

Ask the people who knew Elizabeth Heil about her and they consistently use two words: simple and generous.

"Elizabeth lived simply," says her cousin, Michael Leonard. "She only took what she needed, and the rest she gave to charity. She was extremely devoted to the Church and to her family."

Elizabeth Heil was born in Chicago in 1906 and spent her adult life working in the corporate offices of Walgreen's, Continental Bank, and Chicago Bridge and Iron. She lived a quiet life, receiving Communion daily and keeping a close watch on her family. When she died in 1995, she left a large estate, most of which was divided between the Chicago Province Jesuits and the Catholic Extension Society. Her gift to the Province was specifically earmarked for international missions.

"We were stunned when we heard how much money she had saved," says Fr. John Rochford, pastor emeritus of St. Emeric

Parish in Country Club Hills, Illinois, and a cousin of Elizabeth's. "She had always been so frugal. We weren't surprised at how generous she was, though. She had always been loyal to the Jesuits because of her education at Loyola University."

Elizabeth attended Loyola University in the 1920s, graduating from the School of Commerce there. "She was such an interesting lady," says Mrs. Peggy Leonard, Michael's wife. "She always pursued education. She read a lot and always knew what was happening in the world. Elizabeth was so proud of her degree from Loyola."

One of Michael Leonard's first memories of Elizabeth centers around her passion for learning. When he was in high school and a member of the Paulist Choir (a group both Elizabeth and her brother Roy followed devotedly), he would go to her house every night after dinner and she would help him with his algebra.

"She would drill me on my algebra every night from 8:30 until 11:30," Michael recalls. "Sometimes she would have me over for dinner with her mother and her brother—but that was probably so she could get me there earlier and we could do more work!"

And the result? "I sure learned my algebra well!"

Fr. Rochford and the Leonards (along with another cousin, Florence Jones) accepted the Ignatius of Loyola award given to Elizabeth posthumously at the Chicago Province's Companions dinner in September. "She would not have wanted the recognition," Michael says. "She wouldn't want anyone to know what she did. But we were so proud of her, and it is great for us in her family to know that she is being recognized. She is an example for others."

And what did this simple, generous woman teach those around her? "I learned from her that you can live for others," Michael says. "You can live a life of simplicity and charity and your life can be rich and full. Elizabeth's was all that." ❧



Elizabeth Heil's relatives accepted the Ignatius of Loyola award on her behalf at the Companions' dinner in September. They are, from left, Michael and Peggy Leonard, Jean McDonnell, Fr. John Rochford, and Florence Jones.