



**“She dared to put on a religious habit at 17, and take it off at 65 to become what Sargent Shriver called “the greatest breath of fresh air, Washington had ever known.”
Sister Francetta Barberis SL**



Sir. Francetta Barberis, SL
*Photo Courtesy University of Texas at El Paso
Library Special Collections Department*

The energy and intellect that Francetta Barberis had exhibited since becoming a Sister of Loretto at age 17 found new outlets in the excitement of the mid 1960’s. Born Madeline Barberis in St. Louis at the turn of the century she had served as a teacher at St. Mary’s Academy in Denver, and directed the expansion of Loretto Academy in El Paso over a six year period. She served as a college administrator six years at Loretto Heights in Denver and Webster College in suburban St. Louis.

At age 64 she was eager to actualize the reforms of Vatican II. This petite lively nun made national news when she became the first Sister of Loretto to go out into the world dressed in a nun’s habit. Her new job was as a coordinator in President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s newly created Job Corps. From a base in a Washington DC apartment she used her background in the education of women to expand opportunities for poor girls.

She said as she resigned the presidency of Webster, “ Mine is a service order which makes it especially appropriate to engage in a new type of

service in the anti-poverty program. I want to keep at it as long as I feel fit for the work.” She toured the nation and helped stabilize a newly created Women’s Job Corp in St. Petersburg FL. She reminded the community, “These girls are getting an opportunity to fulfill their hopes. The concept is ‘love thy neighbor’ and they have a sense of this love. They’re such dear girls. I’ve worked with women all my life and I know.”



Sir. Jacqueline Grennan
Circa early 1960’s.
*Photo courtesy of Loretto
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At Francetta’s eightieth birthday celebration, Jacqueline Grennan, her protégée, described her as “a woman who dared to put on a religious habit at seventeen and take it off at sixty-five to become what Sargent Shriver called the greatest breath of fresh air Washington has every known.”

“She was an elegant teacher and the masterful mentor, for whom life is a mystery to be lived and loved and not a problem to be solved.”

“She was a sisterly superior and a pixie president who loved Loretto in El Paso, Loretto Heights and Webster College with detached attachment—who left the buildings as a legacy and took a pencil box as her possession.”

The El Paso Loretto Community invites all interested citizens to events during their Bicentennial in 2012.