A champion of the poor and marginalized, and proponent of women’s leadership in the Church, whose infectious smile brought joy and laughter to those who knew her best, died on October 3, 2019 at Carondelet Village in St. Paul. Avis was born on a farm near New Rockford, ND to William and Katherine (Ackermann) Allmaras on November 8, 1933. Avis (Mary Jacob) entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in 1951, fully knowing she wanted “to be of service to people.” She earned a BA in History and Elementary Education (1961) from the College of St. Catherine and an MA in Psychology (1971) from the University of MN. Avis spent more than 20 years as teacher, principal and guidance counselor for many twin city Catholic schools. She later spent the next several years as pastoral minister and justice coordinator at St. Luke in St. Paul, St. Dominic in Northfield and St. Albert the Great in Minneapolis. Before retiring, Avis spent 7 years serving at Leaning in Style, a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

In 1989 Avis received the Mary Mulheron Ministry Award and in 1995 the Archbishop John Ireland Award for her passionate commitment to justice, the common good and human dignity of all. Of this work Avis said:

The baptismal reality of “being clothed with Christ” (Gal. 3:27-28) can occur only when we do theological reflections with the dear neighbor. The challenges for us to see where there can no longer be divisions between Jew and Greek, may be a call to set aside religious and cultural elitism that presumes Roman Catholicism and European-American experiences are normative. There can no longer be distinctions between slave or free. We do social analysis with those who are systematically denied their own voice and suffer economic, political and racial exploitation. There are no longer male and female as we seek radical equality for genders.

Taking action after these reflections may, indeed, roil the waters because the invitation from Sophia challenges us to recognize our own complicity in the very systems of oppression we seek to eradicate. The invitation to be clothed with Christ includes the marks of the cross. ~ May, 1999

Avis was caretaker and “hostess with the mostest,” embodying hospitality at Timberlee, the lake house beloved by generations of CSJs. Memories of sleeping in the boathouse, swimming with the loons and the beauty of a particular double rainbow stayed with her till the end.
Avis was a gifted gardener who loved nature and all the joy and beauty that being outdoors had to offer. She was an avid reader who loved Jon Hassler books, mystery novels and anything about liberation theology. She loved playing cards with friends and right up to the end was able to passionately communicate just which card she wanted to play. Avis was a talented seamstress who made many coats over the years. She enjoyed doing woodworking and actually made her own urn. Of her life Avis had this to say:

“I like my life. I think you are either happy or unhappy and what you are doing now is all accidental. Whatever your lifestyle, if you are an integrated person and are making the choices you want to make, I think you are happy.”

Avis is preceded in death by her parents; sisters Catherine, Elizabeth, and Frances Allmaras, Helen (Steve) Wishinsky; brothers Alfred, Donald, Edward (Alice), J. William (Alice) Allmaras; Sisters-in-law Martha and Naomi Allmaras; nieces Anna Wishinsky Carlson and Barbara Wishinsky. She is survived by brothers Lawrence and Theodore Allmaras; sister-in-law Mary Claire Allmaras; many nieces and nephews; grand-nieces and grandnephews; the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and Consociates. Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Wednesday, October 16, 2019, 11:00 AM, in Our Lady of the Presentation Chapel, 1884 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul, with Visitation at 10:00 AM preceding Mass. Burial at Resurrection Cemetery in Mendota Heights.

Sister Avis, rest in love and peace.