



Birth
January 6, 1926

Baptism
January 24, 1926

Profession
July 31, 1946

Death
November 18, 2015

Burial
Chatawa Cemetery
Chatawa, Mississippi

*Precious and blessed is
the death of the faithful
before God... for
they die in union with
their dear Jesus, in the
grace of God, in peace.*

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger
Foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame
Letter 11, September 10, 1831

In Loving Memory

Sister Anna Mary Caronia, SSND

The feast of the Epiphany, 1926, brought the gift of little Anna Mae Frances to the family of Anthony and Mary (Triola) Caronia. It was Mrs. Caronia's 26th birthday. Anna Mae was baptized January 24 in their parish church, St. Michael's in New Orleans. She was the middle daughter of five girls in the Caronia family. Their son Frank, had died as a toddler before Anna Mae was born.

Anna Mae thrived in this close-knit, faith-filled family as well as in her extended family. The multiple Caronia cousins relished their carefree days in the Annunciation Square-neighborhood life of games and swimming. The young Anna Mae shadowed her mother particularly as she prepared meals. There Anna Mae developed a life-long love of presenting a wholesome, appetizing meal. It is no wonder that when she came to the convent she asked to become one who serves other sisters rather than to become a teacher.

With her sisters, Anna Mae attended both St. Michael and St. Alphonsus elementary schools where she was taught by the Sisters of Mercy. When it was time for secondary education, she enrolled in Redemptorist High School where the School Sisters of Notre Dame were her teachers.

Sister Anna Mary points to her interest in a religious vocation being developed, — “by my teachers, especially Sister Clara Bergthold and my sister, Sister Theresa Martin (who had entered two years earlier).” Anna Mae did follow the example of her older sister as she entered SSND in 1943. On reception she received the name Mary Vita, but following the Second Vatican Council, she returned to a form of her baptismal name.

Sister Anna Mary's ministry illustrates an interesting continuum of enabling those who need to rely on others. When she was assigned some weeks at St. Elizabeth's Day Nursery in St. Louis, she describes her first taste of this ministry as “seven weeks of joy and happiness.” Little children had captured her heart. It was for their good she now wanted to dedicate her efforts. For seven years after her profession Anna Mary developed her educational methods and skills with preschoolers in New Orleans and St. Louis.

Using her experience and building on it, Sister Anna Mary responded to the call to “enable children with special needs from the beginnings of their formal learning through successful job placement.” This she did for nine years at St. Mary's Special School in St. Louis.

Attesting to her success there was the call for Sister Anna Mary to develop the special education system in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Forming first a school — being its administrator — then becoming supervisor of special education for the diocese filled her next 16 years. Working closely with the Louisiana State Department of Education during those years led Sister Anna Mary's colleagues to acknowledge and then request her leadership, expertise and time as a member of their department.

Even though Sister Anna Mary was a state employee, she was able to bring SSND values and those of Catholic education to the service of a long-

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Anna Mary Caronia

neglected minority and to their families. The position was rewarding, but also taxing. Filling forms, moving through channels and red tape were frustrating. Extensive travel throughout the state took her too often from community life. After three years of ministering with 90 colleagues in the department and enabling those needing services in the outreaches of Louisiana, Anna Mary was discerning a future.

Sister Anna Mary's administrative skills and expertise in addressing sociological challenges of families made her next endeavor seem a natural. In 1981, after more than three decades serving formal education, she became administrator of Nazareth Inn, a 270-apartment complex for the elderly, under the auspices of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Assessing this ministry, she said, "I most enjoy being of service to the elderly, particularly to those who have no family members to assist them." Later, after Sister Anna Mary's retirement from Nazareth Inn, the facility's director asked her to assume pastoral care for the Catholic patients in his facility. This she did for months as they developed trainees from a neighboring parish to do pastoral care.

Following almost 20 years as administrator at Nazareth Inn and more than a half-century of active ministry Sister Anna Mary retired in 1999. A generous donor, whose family she had assisted, gave her and Sister Theresa Martin a retirement gift of a European tour. A highlight was an arrangement by fellow New Orleanian and U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, Lindy Boggs, of attendance at Pope John Paul II's daily Mass and private audience. The Holy Father presented Sister Anna Mary with a rosary.

Much of Sister Anna Mary's contribution to the lives of others will go unheralded for it was done obscurely. A sample of her public recognition by others are: the National Catholic Education Association President's Award for outstanding service to Catholic education and Catholic Charities honor of her as Religious of the Year.

Nudged to relate her most enjoyable ministry, Sister Anna Mary responded, "I have enjoyed all, however my most enjoyable and rewarding ministry has been with the children requiring special education."

Sister Anna Mary prepared for these ministries by earning a bachelor's degree in sociology, a master's degree in special education and certification as a housing occupancy specialist.

Sister Anna Mary continued her service to those needing support when she lived on the Westbank in the New Orleans area. She and Sister Theresa Martin retired to St. Mary of the Pines early in 2014. About a year later Sister Anna Mary experienced an episode that impaired her movement and her speech. She was aware and enjoyed attending community prayer and activities until shortly before she died peacefully on November 18, 2015.

Sister Anna Mary described her year in the novitiate as "a little bit of heaven here below that one can only love and wish for more." Our prayer for her is that she may now be enjoying that "more."

By Sister MarieClare Powell, SSND

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