

# *In Loving Memory*

## Sister Mary John Lachowsky, SSND



**Birth**  
October 5, 1917

**Baptism**  
October 7, 1917

**Profession**  
August 19, 1937

**Death**  
March 26, 2014

**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

Near the end of the last century Sister Mary John wrote, "Chatawa has been my home now for more than half a decade and I still look back to my beginning residence here as one of God's great blessings. Having passed 80, I know that time is running out and eternity is just over the next hilltop."

Gertrude Mary was born October 5, 1917, to John E. and Eleanor (Strack) Lachowsky, in Conway Arkansas. She was baptized just two days later in St. Joseph Church. Gertrude was always considered the eldest of the six boys and four girls for the Lachowskys had experienced the tragic, sudden death of their first child at one month of age.

Gertrude was nurtured in this close-knit farm family. The children shared the chores and time for prayer and play. Together they attended St. Joseph Elementary and Secondary School where they were taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Mary John wrote later, "My Dad was very proud of us—when we did well in school or when neighbors had something good to say about us; and later, at my profession, at my brother, Clem's ordination and at the weddings he witnessed he was so proud it was almost sinful." Sister Mary John, in turn, was very proud of her family. Along with her love of God, love of family permeated her life.

Gertrude was a good student who loved learning and easily mastered the material required of her. During the summer following graduation, the pastor arranged to take several girls to an SSND reception ceremony in St. Louis. "I resolved to make an adventure of this longest trip in my life. A cousin was one of those along for the ride. As we rode home, the two of us repeated, 'It's not for me.' My mother asked me the dreaded question about next year. On my response that I'd probably get a job she declared that my talent was not to be wasted; the family had the responsibility to develop it; if I wasn't going to the convent, I would go to college. I was stunned and replied, "You don't have the money to send me to college. 'We'll borrow it.' she said. I now felt the necessity of coming to a decision I didn't want to make. Meanwhile my cousin, who had gone to St. Louis with me came over for a farewell before entering (she was to become Sister Mary Albertus). I couldn't believe it. Something in me was released. I said simply, 'I'll go with you.'"

Gertrude was two years in the candidature with about 90 other young women. In 1936, she received the habit of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the name, Mary John. She pronounced her vows in 1937. Mary John was assigned to study at St. Louis University during the next three semesters. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Latin and French. Subsequently she was awarded a Master of Arts in Latin.

Sister Mary John's first assignment was to teach middle school children at St. Francis deSales School in St. Louis. After two years there she was engaged for the next 12 years in teaching Latin, English and religion to secondary school students in Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, and Louisiana. She was principal for one year at Our Lady of Good Counsel School in New Orleans and supervised the boarders for a year at the Academy in Belleville, Ill.

From these experiences, Sister Mary John's profession as educator took a surprising turn. She was chosen to make up the second band of SSND missionaries to Japan in 1951. In the sisters' third year in Japan young

*continued*

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*Sister Mary John Lachowsky*



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TRANSFORMING THE WORLD  
THROUGH EDUCATION

Japanese women were applying to become members of the congregation. This was surprising because the time of acquaintance was short, and the American military had so recently devastated Japan's major cities by fire bombing and with the atomic bomb. Sister Mary John was chosen to teach and help form these young women. She related, "My 21 years in Japan was the longest, hardest, and probably the most enriching period of my life."

She studied Japanese while functioning as novice mistress. Sister Maureen Wada, one of Sister Mary John's former novices reflected, "When we were postulants and novices we were so impressed with her joy-filled spirit that we were inspired to dedicate ourselves to our God. The joyful atmosphere she brought to our convent attracted many people to SSND. One of the customs she introduced to us is making doughnuts on the day before Ash Wednesday. We still keep the custom in our community. We praise and thank God that he sent her to Japan as our formation director."

In 1964, Sister Mary John was elected the regional leader of the SSNDs in Japan. Following a six year term in this office, she taught at Kyoto Notre Dame College for women. These memories of the central and vigorous years of Sister Mary John's life also reflect current companions' early and lasting memories of her—the generous, humorous, lover of people, lover of learning, and lover of God.

In 1972 she returned to the states. The year's discerning in San Antonio directed her to pastoral ministry. This she did during the next two years in St. James Parish in Coolidge, Ariz. Next she was called to serve in the San Jose Parish Center in Albuquerque. Responding to phone and doorbell calls of people in distress; teacher training; coordinating of sacramental programs; visiting the sick; comforting the bereaved; assisting clients in filling forms in the marriage tribunal, She summed up, "It's a good place to be and work. It called me to develop talents I never thought I had." One talent she developed was facility in a third language—Spanish.

In 1986 she became a charter member of a semireirement home in Lake Charles, Louisiana. She helped to found an interfaith program, named Abraham's Tent which fed the hungry and the homeless. Two years later, the headline in the diocesan paper read, Sister Mary John is Citizen of the Year. This honor was in recognition of, launching and directing Abraham's Tent.

Energy was ebbing now. A move to a much needed literacy program required less physical effort. After four more years in Lake Charles, Sister Mary John thought it best to semi-retire at St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa. Here for 21 years she was tutor, sacristan, driver, seamstress, welcoming and praying person. Friends from her ministries and new friends sought her conversation and inspiration. She kept up a lively correspondence with them and shared with them what she had gleaned from her broad scope of classical and current literature.

Sister Mary John went to her eternal reward on March 26, 2014. She was preceded in death by her parents, her brothers, Rev. Clement Lachowsky, CSSp, Norbert, Louis, Alphonse, and Dennis, and her sister, Angela. She is survived by her brother, John and her sisters, Mrs. Rosemary Zimmerman, and Mrs. Clarita Lepine along with numerous nieces and nephews. Her first cousin, Sister Elizabeth Nabholz, and her second cousin, Sister Helen Roper are community members in Chatawa. Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated by Rev. Brian Kaskie on March 29, 2014. Her sister, Rosemary and her husband, two nephews and two nieces attended.

*By Sister MarieClare Powell*