

# *In Loving Memory*

## Sister Joan (Pierre Marie) Schaefer



Birth  
August 14, 1933

Baptism  
August 20, 1933

Profession  
August 2, 1954

Death  
April 18, 2023

Burial  
Chatawa Cemetery

*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

Sister Joan (formerly known as Pierre Marie) Schaefer, 89, died peacefully at Trinity Trace Community Care Center, Covington, Louisiana on April 18, 2023, as sisters prayed with her.

On August 14, 1933, the youngest of fourteen children was born to Bertha (Hoffman) and Peter Schaefer in Belleville, Illinois. She was baptized on August 20, 1933, at St. Peter's Cathedral and named Joan Marie. Three of the children died as infants, so the family of eleven living children, six girls and five boys, grew up in a happy and thoroughly Catholic environment with the joys and challenges of a large family, especially during the World War II years.

Joan attended St. Peter's Cathedral kindergarten and grade school, staffed by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In the eighth grade, Joan felt a desire to follow God's call into religious life. One week after her older sister, Dolores, (Sister Daniel Marie) entered the candidature at Sancta Maria in Ripa, St. Louis, Joan entered Notre Dame High School as an aspirant.

Following graduation, she entered the candidature on August 30, 1951. During her second year of candidature, she was sent to teach third and fourth grade children at Blessed Sacrament School in Hannibal, Missouri. She was received into the novitiate on August 1, 1953, and given the name Pierre Marie. She professed first vows on August 2, 1954, and final vows on August 2, 1960. She later returned to her baptismal name.

Sister Joan received a bachelor's degree in English from the former Notre Dame College in St. Louis, in 1963, and a master's degree in secondary education from Xavier University, New Orleans, Louisiana in 1973.

Following profession, Sister Joan ministered in Catholic education for twenty-three years. She taught at St. Anthony, Longview, Texas; Christ the King School, Corpus Christi, Texas; St. Philip Neri, Metairie, Louisiana; Redemptorist Junior High School, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She was principal at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Dallas, Texas.

In 1974, she began to experience a call to serve God's people in the foreign missions. Three years later, in 1977, she was missioned to Ghana, West Africa. During the next eighteen years, she taught at St. Martin's Secondary School, Nsawam, Ghana; was co-director of the Catholic Conference Center in Nsawam; was a teacher at St. James Seminary, Sunyani, Ghana and became headmistress at the newly opened Notre Dame Girls Senior High School in Sunyani. During this time, she also ministered at a women's prison, teaching Bible classes and holding religious services. Following a short period of community service at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi and a sabbatical, she returned to Ghana and ministered as an occupational therapist at the Orthopedic Training Centre in Nsawam.

*continued*

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*Sister Joan (Pierre  
Marie) Schaefer*



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Due to a surgical error in 1986, Sister Joan had a paralyzed vocal cord and found teaching difficult. Therefore, in 1996, her next ministry was postulant director for the former Dallas Province at the formation house in San Antonio, Texas. She also served adults in a literacy program part-time. In 2001, she was called to be the director of the Retreat Center at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi.

When her term at the Retreat Center ended in 2009, she was asked by Sister Mary Kerber, District Leader for the District of Africa, to return to Africa as the secretary in the District Office in Accra, Ghana. She was present in August 2011, when the District of Africa became a Province. She said her final goodbye to Africa at the end of 2012, and spent six months assisting in the archives at the Generalate in Rome.

Back in the United States, she spent several months helping out at the former provincial house in Dallas, before returning to St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi, as the assistant to the director of the Retreat Center. She moved to St. Anthony's Gardens, Covington, Louisiana, in 2020, where she continued to perform community service. Following a short hospital stay, she was transferred to Trinity Trace Community Care Center, Covington, in early March 2023, and placed on hospice in April 2023. She died peacefully around 8:00 p.m. on April 18, 2023, at Trinity Trace as sisters kept vigil. She chose to be cremated.

Funeral services were held on May 9, 2023, at Most Holy Trinity Church in Covington. The reading of her biography and sharing of memories preceded the celebration of the Mass of Resurrection with Rev. Rodney Bourg as president. The burial was in the Chatawa Cemetery, Chatawa, Mississippi.

Sister Joan was preceded in death by her parents; five brothers: Hugo (Dorothy), Ralph (Adelia), James (Marilyn), Richard (Adele), Thomas (Mary); and five sisters: Henrietta (Alphonse) Bauer, Sylvia (Kenneth) Winter, Marilyn (Clarence) Voegtle, Sister Dolores Schaefer, SSND and Alice (Fred) Holtgrewe. Surviving are numerous nephews and nieces, cousins, friends, SSNDs and SSND associates.

Sister Joan was a kind, gentle, prayerful, hospitable woman who witnessed God's love and care for all of God's people. She had a deep love for the poor. She was instrumental in the beginnings of the Diocese of Sunyani, especially in the area of education, and is regarded as one of the "ancestors" of the diocese. At the funeral service, memories were shared from sisters who lived with and ministered with her in Ghana. Her heart remained in Africa. She enjoyed reading, gardening, writing poetry and haiku, needlework and word puzzles. As she reflected on her years as a School Sister of Notre Dame, Sister Joan said, "Wherever I am, I will continue to live gratefully to God and all the wonderful people who appeared in the varied snapshots of my long life." An example of a haiku she wrote is: "Oh, Resurrection! | Bring the life of Christ to me | again and again." May she experience the fullness of the life of the Resurrected Christ as she enters eternal life.

*By Sister Carol Marie Wildt, SSND*