

In Loving Memory

Sister Ann Semel



Birth
January 19, 1932

Baptism
February 8, 1932

Profession
July 31, 1953

Death
September 27, 2018

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 Ann Semel, 86, died on Thursday, September 27, 2018. She was the oldest of five children born to Oscar and Anna Mae (Martinez) Semel in New Orleans.

Ann attended St. Mary's Elementary School and Redemptorist High School, where she was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame. She attributes her vocation to "simply being taught by the Sisters for 12 years." She remembered, "In particular, Sisters Amelita Lukinovich and Clarea Hotze were inspirational, friendly, and possessed of an obvious goodness. I wanted to be like them."

In August 1950, Ann entered the candidature at the motherhouse in St. Louis. In 1952, she received the habit and the name Sister Edmond Ann. Ann frequently told the story of her unusual novitiate beginning. "Due to the arrival of another baby girl in our family in July, my mother could not attend the Reception Ceremony. But God was very good to me, for in September I enjoyed my parents and my new baby sister's visit for three days."

After profession in 1953, Sister Edmond Ann was sent to teach at Little Flower of Jesus School, New Orleans. "This was like a dream come true," she said. "I was a teacher of children in New Orleans where my family lived. I loved my work there for the next nine years." She was both teacher and school principal during that last year at Little Flower.

In 1962, Sister Edmond Ann began pursuing her doctorate in English at the University of Notre Dame, New Orleans. While finishing her dissertation, she was sent to teach English at St. Gerard High School in San Antonio. She earned her doctorate degree in 1966.

Sister Ann next joined the English department at St. Mary's University in San Antonio. She forged a unique path as she joined colleagues at the university for she was one of just three women on a male-dominated campus and the first woman in the humanities department. This was just one step in fashioning innovations in the department and in the broader community.

Sister Ann observed the challenges her students were facing and was not satisfied that she turned out more English teachers than there were positions available, so she designed a degree program that included more marketable skills. Within the university department structure she established a graduate program in English-Communication Arts. Her own experience with the Japanese culture and the high value she placed on other cultures inspired her to introduce a required course to the English department's degree program that looked at short stories from other cultures.

Sister Ann advanced in the department. She became a tenured professor, broadened the American literature courses to include minority authors, was elected department chair, served for many years as director of the department's graduate program and mentored scores of students. She was published in a number of periodicals and was co-editor of an American literature series. A

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volume of the 'Pecan Grove Review,' a literary publication of the students of the university's English department, was dedicated to Sister Ann in 2011. Crowning these achievements, a scholarship was established in her name by her admiring former students.

Sister Ann was a founding member of St. Mary's University President's Peace Commission. She was an active advocate for peace and justice, and she motivated her students to be involved in local and global causes.

On being queried about her dedication to education, Sister Ann mused: "I love teaching. Many years ago I realized that the only way to achieve systemic change is through a strong moral-social education of society's future leaders. I want them to gain greater knowledge of literature, to be better able to think and interpret what they read, to conduct research and to write, but I want more than this. I want them to gain insight that will bring new meaning to their personal lives — insight enough to seek truth in a world that is often filled with deceit."

On the social side, Ann was a great hostess. It was not uncommon to find students and English department faculty members entertained and nourished with New Orleans cuisine, music and social repartee in Sister Ann's home community. Sister Ann and her community also hosted similar gatherings with prayer and sharing for young women they thought might be called to religious life.

Sister Ann retired after 43 years of university teaching. Dr. Charles Cotrell, St. Mary's University president, paid tribute to Sister Ann in announcing her retirement, "She has touched the minds and hearts of nearly 10,000 students during her years at St. Mary's."

Typical among those thousands is Ken Slavin who tells us of Sister Ann's teaching methods. "She had high standards and expected the same from her students," he said. "But she always knew how to balance those expectations with kindness and fairness. Sister Ann taught me how to appreciate literature both as an art form and as a pathway to critical thinking and analysis."

Her health was failing as she came to St. Mary of the Pines retirement community in the spring of 2012, but still she was most faithful to prayer and community activities, and a regular patron of the community library. She was willing to assist wherever needed up to a few days before she died. When she needed help herself, she asked one who was in the process of moving cartons, "May I help you?"

May Sister Ann rejoice in her meeting with God whose life she so faithfully followed.

By Sister Carol Nishke, SSND