

# *In Loving Memory*

## Sister Barbara (M. Laura) Bacak



Birth  
June 21, 1949

Baptism  
June 29, 1949

Profession  
July 27, 1969

Death  
August 31, 2021

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

Barbara Joan Bacak was born on June 21, 1949, in Kerrville, Texas, to John and Bettie (Polansky) Bacak. They welcomed her into the family as their seventh child and fourth daughter. Barbara was baptized in Notre Dame Institute, Kerrville, on June 29, 1949. When she was just one year old, the Bacaks moved from Kerrville to Alice, Texas. It was a full and pleasant life for Barbara, with four brothers and three sisters.

When she was about four, she had her first school experience. Her mother had surgery and, for a few days, she went to St. Elizabeth School with her older brothers and sisters and sat in Sister Concepta (Loretta) Nelson's primary class. When Barbara was officially enrolled in St. Elizabeth, she began to know the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), who taught her. She was touched by their deep faith and joy and wanted that for herself. There were two sisters whom she remembered especially: Sister Concepta, who implanted in her a deep desire to learn and to read, and Sister Gemma Marie Dittle, who Barbara never had as a teacher, but she helped in her classroom. It was through Sister Gemma's mentoring that she became a School Sister of Notre Dame and a teacher.

Barbara attended the public junior and senior high schools in Alice because there were no Catholic high schools there. Her favorite subjects were the sciences and math. As an all-around good student, she was placed in the honors literature class and was a member of the National Honor Society. It was during her high school years that Barbara's leadership talents were noted and developed in class offices, in the National Honor Society, and as a member of the Catholic Youth Organization in her parish. Barbara graduated ninth in her class of 350 students.

Barbara was close to the Church. She loved Mass and was glad for the changes in the rituals after Vatican II. She prayed to know God's will for her. While discerning God's will, she explored many careers, including being a ballerina, a flight attendant, or joining the Peace Corps. However, a visit to her sister, Sister Rose Ann confirmed her desire to enter SSND.

Barbara entered as a candidate on August 22, 1967, and began her academic and religious preparation at the Motherhouse in Dallas. She was received into the novitiate on July 27, 1968, and was given the name Mary Laura. She later returned to her baptismal name. She professed first vows on July 27, 1969, and final vows on September 25, 1976.

Following the novitiate, she continued her studies. After graduating from the University of Dallas in 1971, with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, Sister Barbara was sent to teach primary grades at Our Lady Queen of Heaven School in Lake Charles, Louisiana. After five years in Lake Charles, the subsequent five years found her with primary children of different cultures, first in Marrero, Louisiana, and then in San Antonio, Texas.

While teaching in San Antonio, Sister Barbara studied for and received a master's degree in elementary administration from Our Lady of the Lake

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University in 1980. This led to new challenges as principal of two schools, both in Jackson, Mississippi. She spent five years at St. Theresa until the province withdrew the sisters from the school. The local bishop closed Holy Ghost School for financial reasons and because fewer than ten percent of the children were Catholic. At both schools, Sister Barbara, the faculty, and the parents worked together in helping the children to love learning and find meaning in their lives.

She liked working with adults in the parishes of the schools she served. She became an active participant in programs such as the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and Bible study groups. Looking for a new ministry, and knowing that she enjoyed working with adults on a faith level, she was assigned as a pastoral assistant to St. Margaret Parish in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

After six years, Sister Barbara took the elements of a great evangelizer to a new culture in a new country. She took time to learn about the culture and the language before leaving to evangelize in Guatemala in 1996. On her return to the United States, after five years in Guatemala, Barbara continued to assist in evangelizing among the Spanish-speaking in Parishes in Cuero and Inez, Texas.

Sister Barbara was invited to nurture vocations for the congregation as Vocation Director for the former Dallas Province, and then for the newly-formed Central Pacific Province. This she did for six years.

From 2013, until some months before retiring to St. Anthony's Gardens, Covington, Louisiana, Sister Barbara trained for and became a member of the chaplains' team at Parkland Hospital in Dallas. She especially enjoyed helping new mothers learn to care for their infants.

In November 2019, Sister Barbara joined Sister Rose Ann and the other SSNDs from Chatawa who had moved to St. Anthony's Gardens several months earlier.

A short time after Sisters Barbara and Rose Ann came to St. Anthony's, they received an almost unbelievable message. Sister Barbara's brother, James, and his wife, Irene, and another brother, Tommy Bacak, were driving back from the funeral of their brother, Hank. There was an accident, and all three died. Sister Barbara, whose health was already in decline, seemed to decline now at a greater pace.

Some months later, her community sisters sat and prayed with her for a few weeks as they witnessed her slow and peaceful dying. Early on the morning of August 31, 2021, she went home to God. Due to Hurricane Ida's impact on the Louisiana area, her funeral services at Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church and burial in the Chatawa Cemetery were delayed until September 9, 2021.

She is survived by her sisters, Sister Rose Ann Bacak, SSND, Theresa Heinrich and Bettie Mae Opiela, and her brother John.

Surely, her peace was just a continuation of her faith life. She had reflected, "Being at prayer, I experienced mystery, serenity, peace." Now, may she rest in that peace as she sees the face of the God, whose will she sought and followed so faithfully in her life.

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*By Sister Marie Clare Powell, SSND*