



Birth
October 23, 1934

Baptism
October 24, 1934

Profession
August 2, 1954

Death
February 15, 2020

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 Bernice Orscheln

Sister Bernice (Marie Charles) Orscheln, 85, passed away peacefully on February 15, 2020, at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi.

Bernice Catherine Orscheln was born on a farm near Loose Creek, Missouri, on October 23, 1934. She was the second of four children and the only daughter of Charles and Conradine (Muenks) Orscheln. She was baptized the following day at Immaculate Conception Church in Loose Creek. Bernice was effectively the oldest child in the family, as her older brother died as an infant.

When she was five years old, the family moved to a farm two miles south of Chamois, Missouri. She and her younger brothers trudged those miles twice each day, no matter the rain, sleet or snow, to the Most Pure Heart of Mary School. The school was a two-room, four-grades-in-a-room school, taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. When they arrived back home, they enjoyed a snack of cookies or cinnamon rolls before doing their farm chores. After supper, they did their homework by lamp light since there was no electricity in the house until Bernice was in the eighth grade.

Throughout these grade school years, Bernice felt the desire to become a religious like her teachers. In 1948, her parents supported her in enrolling in the aspiranture of the School Sisters of Notre Dame at Notre Dame High School in St. Louis. Bernice entered the candidature on August 30, 1951. She was received into the novitiate on August 1, 1953, and given the name Marie Charles. She pronounced first vows on August 2, 1954, and final vows on August 2, 1960.

Sister Marie Charles began her teaching career at St. Joseph, Cairo, Illinois, and then at Immaculate Conception, Liberty, Texas. After she earned a degree in biology in 1961, from the former Notre Dame College, St. Louis, she taught at St. Gerard High School in San Antonio, Texas, and St. Gerard Majella in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In the 1970s, she returned to her baptismal name, Bernice.

While teaching in San Antonio, she was afflicted with a serious respiratory illness, which necessitated lung surgery. She was inspired by the nurses' care during her hospital stay and began to wonder if she were called to be a nurse. With community encouragement, she searched for the training facility that would be most advantageous for one with her background. She became an R.N. with a bachelor's degree from Baylor School of Nursing, Dallas, Texas in 1973. In that same year, the Dallas Province made the commitment to send missionaries to Ghana, West Africa. Sister Bernice recalled, "Since childhood, I had a deep desire to be a missionary to Africa. I began to realize that I could now make good use of my nursing profession among the poor in this foreign mission. I volunteered to go to Ghana."

Sister Bernice was selected as one of the five sisters to be the founding community opening the first mission of the School Sisters in that country. On February 11, 1974, they arrived in Ghana. During her years in Ghana, she

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Bernice Orscheln



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opened and was administrator of the Notre Dame Clinic. Once the clinic was well established, she returned to the United States in 1988.

She ministered as staff nurse in the infirmary at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi, and as Home Health Nurse in Pike County, Mississippi. In 1992, she was asked to serve for one year as Director of Health Care for the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur in Fort Worth, Texas. She then returned to St. Mary of the Pines as Coordinator of Health Care.

After five years, she requested to move to Jefferson City, Missouri, to care for her aging parents. She found a nursing position in St. Joseph Home for the Aged. Her parents moved to St. Joseph when care for them at home became increasingly difficult.

With the death of her parents, she returned to St. Mary of the Pines. Just months after her return, a biopsy procedure revealed a cancerous growth requiring surgery and chemotherapy. Several years later, she underwent a second tumor surgery, which resulted in a benign diagnosis. After a third diagnosis and cancer-related surgery in 2013, the surgeon remarked, "God must still have plans for you." Those plans included her inspiration, prayer and service at St. Mary of the Pines. Special to Sister Bernice was her volunteer, one-morning-a-week greeting and her counselor with the American Cancer Society at the Mississippi Cancer Institute at McComb, Mississippi.

Sister Bernice joyfully celebrated her 60th Jubilee as a professed religious in 2014. Her spirits grew even as her body became more fragile. In 2019, she expected to move with the rest of the St. Mary of the Pines community into assisted living accommodations at Covington, Louisiana. However, her fragile condition necessitated that she wait until skilled care facilities became available. God took her into His own care on Saturday afternoon, February 15, 2020.

Visitation and prayer for Sister Bernice were held on February 19, 2020, at St. Alphonsus Church in McComb, Mississippi, followed by the Mass of Christian Burial with Rev. Suresh Thirumalareddy, pastor of St. James Church in Magnolia, Mississippi, as presider. Sisters, associates and friends attended the funeral services. Burial was in the Chatawa Cemetery.

Sister Bernice was preceded in death by her parents and two of her brothers, Edmund and Herbert. She is survived by her brother, Ralph, of Holts Summit, Missouri, and sister-in-law, Carol (Mrs. Herbert) Orschlen, many devoted nieces, a nephew and cousins.

She concluded her autobiography, "Jesus walks with me daily as listener, friend and companion. I count on his grace, presence and strength till the end of my journey on this earth. I have been gifted through my own experiences with cancer and in my ministry to cancer patients, also by the support and prayers of my sisters and the care of my Doctors and care givers. Their deep faith, hope and love have truly inspired me on my journey." May she rejoice in her God as she comes to her journey's final destination!

By Sister Marie Clare Powell, SSND