

In Loving Memory

Sister Clare Marie Cato



Birth
October 8, 1924

Baptism
November 21, 1937

Profession
July 27, 1945

Death
January 31, 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 Clare Marie Cato, 93, died Wednesday, January 31, 2018, at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi, after being hospitalized for influenza and pneumonia. She was born Nancy Dell Mary Cato in Itta Bena, Mississippi in 1924, the only child of John Daniel and Hortense (Archard) Cato.

When Nancy was eight years old, tragedy struck this small family when Mrs. Cato passed away. Wrapped in those eight years was an atmosphere and an emotion that accompanied Sister Clare Marie during her whole life. A distinct remembrance was her mother's repeated counsel to, "be a gracious little lady, but not a stiff little lady." Nancy would always try to live that admonition.

Following her mother's death, Nancy lived with her father's sister for some time. Nancy's father was a lumber inspector, and his job required him to move frequently. Nancy moved with her father. She attended seven different public schools in Mississippi and Arkansas as she progressed from third through seventh grade. At one point, she lived with a friend of her mother; three girls in that family claimed her as a cousin and they all remained her life-long friends.

She related the months and years of her anguish, "I found the separation from my mother almost unbearable. When visiting our former home in which, my father still lived, I found myself yielding to a flood of tears because the very atmosphere of my own dear mother still pervaded the home in which, we three had been so happy."

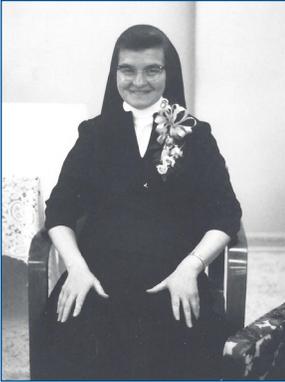
Nancy finally felt some stability when she moved with her father to Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Though the Catos were not Catholic, her father enrolled her at St. Mary's Cathedral School as an eighth grade student. Her teachers were the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Nancy liked her teachers so much she wanted to be like them. She responded to the question on how they were instrumental in her vocation, "They gave me time and listened."

During her eighth grade year, Nancy and her father were baptized, and the Catos were now members of the Catholic Church. Of this special time she remembered, "Even before my baptism I wanted to be like the sisters—to be one of them." Nancy's father allowed her to attend Notre Dame High School in St. Louis as an aspirant. She related, "It was during the high school years that some of the emptiness created by my mother's death seemed to be filled, as I was linked closer to the sisters. Sister Clarona, in particular, became my faithful friend and supported me by her prayer and good example."

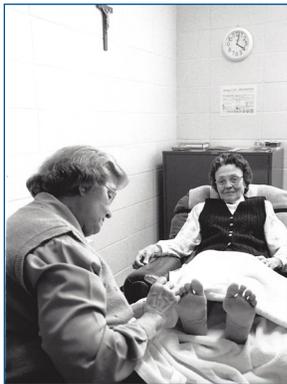
Upon graduation from Notre Dame High School, Nancy knew she was called to religious life. She entered the candidacy of the School Sisters of Notre Dame at Sancta Maria in Ripa in St. Louis. She took the name

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Clare Marie, and in 1945, she professed her vows as a School Sister of Notre Dame.

Sister Clare Marie's first mission assignment was to teach first grade children at a public school in Teutopolis, Illinois. In order to teach at the school, she had to pass the state's two-day exams in all 13 subjects that were taught in the elementary grades. Sister Clare Marie reported, "The district superintendent called to congratulate me on having passed the test in all subjects on the first try."

During her time in Teutopolis, Sister Clare Marie's father married again. She said, "Mary was most devoted to my dad and really loved me, too. Even after my father died in 1949, she always kept in close contact with me until her death."

Sister Clare Marie soon earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in elementary education at Mount St. Mary's College and the University of California in Los Angeles. She spent nine years in California teaching primary grade children in Los Angeles, San Diego and Pico-Rivera.

After the Dallas province was formed in the early 1960s, Sister Clare Marie was sent to Tyler, Texas. After three years, she became a fourth-grade teacher and the principal at St. Peter's School in Fort Worth, Texas. Following this assignment, she taught at Mount Carmel in Houston and St. Gerard's in San Antonio.

After 13 years in Texas, she was called to St. Phillip Neri School in Metairie, Louisiana. Sister Clare Marie's broad experience, as well as her talents and skills, brought depth to the children's education and to the school. Religion, language arts, math and science were the subjects she taught to children in the mid and upper grades. She was also part of the administration.

After 44 years of classroom teaching, Sister Clare Marie responded to a staff need at the province retirement home, St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Mississippi. She interned as a podiatric apprentice of Sister Mary Omer. After Sister Omer's death three years later, the podiatric ministry was hers. One can be sure she thought of Jesus' care of his followers' feet as she tended so many who needed her service. She reminisced, "It was such a good feeling to know that others were being helped. And I was rewarded in the promise of prayer from the sisters."

Sister Clare Marie's health failed in the early 2000s and her mobility was limited by affected lower limbs. Despite these challenges, she became a pleasant, welcoming pray-er and presence in the community.

A funeral mass for Sister Clare Marie was held on Tuesday, February 6, with Father Brian Kaskie as president. She was buried at the Chatawa Cemetery.

By Sister MarieClaire Powell, SSND