



In Loving Memory

Sister Dorothy Ann Balser

Sister Dorothy Ann Balser, 90, died Sunday, January 28, 2018, at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi. She was the sixth child born to George and Irma (Lyons) Balser and grew up in McComb, Mississippi.

Dorothy Ann was baptized at St. Alphonsus Church and attended the parish school there. Decreasing enrollment prompted the school's closure after she finished the third grade. This posed a dilemma for Mr. and Mrs. Balser. The nearest Catholic school, St. Mary of the Pines, was located 18 miles from the Balser home and only admitted girls to the secondary boarding school. The Balsers convinced the principal of the school, Sister Charissia Powers, to open the day school to their six boys, as well as the three girls. The family valued the education at St. Mary of the Pines so much that they moved to Magnolia to be closer to the school.

Upon graduation from St. Mary of the Pines, Dorothy Ann asked to follow her older sister, Sister Kathlyn Balser, SSND (now deceased), to prepare to become a School Sister of Notre Dame. Her mother thought Dorothy Ann was not ready and asked her to work during the next year. So Dorothy Ann went to work as a dispatcher for the Illinois Central Railroad, using the morse code skills she gained during her senior year of high school. The responsibilities of the job required her to travel extensively, spending a great deal of time away from home.

Dorothy Ann related, "The year finally over, my mother honored her word in letting me enter SSND. In August 1946, I received the bonnet in the chapel of St. Mary of the Pines. With three others, I left the same day on the train for Sancta Maria in Ripa in St. Louis. Leaving my family was one of the hardest things I had ever done, but I realized that the family was not left behind but truly in my heart all the time."

Religious and other academic studies advanced Dorothy Ann toward her life as a teacher. She began her third year at Sancta Maria in Ripa as Novice Charissia, a name that honored the sister who had done so much for the Balsers. She returned to her baptismal name after Vatican II. Sister Dorothy Ann wrote of her novitiate year, "I was totally transformed. Each day I would awaken and wonder what surprises God had for me that day. It was a wonderful year."

After profession of vows in 1949, teaching assignments took Sister Dorothy Ann to St. Louis, Baton Rouge and Marrero, Louisiana, Texas and Laurel, Mississippi. Through her teaching assignments, she developed expertise in teaching young children. She wrote, "I began to love teaching. I would wake up each morning with new enthusiasm to get to school and see the children again. I have truly enjoyed my teaching days." In Baton Rouge, she experienced a different challenge—to teach weekly classes for the deaf using sign language.

In 1971, Sister Dorothy Ann began to care for her father in SSND-managed facility, Wynhoven Apartments for the Elderly in Marrero, Louisiana. She appreciated the time she could spend with him. In addition to caring for her father, she assisted the nearby Immaculate Conception Elementary School.

continued

Birth
November 6, 1927

Baptism
November 27, 1927

Profession
August 3, 1949

Death
January 28, 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.*

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Following her father's death, she became the school's primary education coordinator. She later taught at Immaculate Conception School in Laurel, Mississippi and served as CCD Coordinator at St. Francis of Assisi parish in Brookhaven, Mississippi.

In 1985, Sister Dorothy Ann felt called to the SSND mission in Ghana. While there, she helped establish schools in Sunyani and Cape Coast and taught at both. In Sunyani, she taught 40 high school girls reading, phonics, religion and English. While at Cape Coast, she taught kindergarten and first grade students in one room, as there were no walls or doors. She described, "We hung curtains to divide groups. Sometimes it was hard to teach. Goats and chickens, as well as the other children were in competition. God has blessed both schools in Ghana. My eleven years there were truly a wonderful adventure and very exciting."

Sister Dorothy Ann returned to St. Mary of the Pines in 1996. She spent many hours with our hospitalized sisters and on other convent assignments. Her service extended into the community as she joined individuals, families and groups for prayer, for study and visiting the homebound. She helped prepare children, youth and adults to receive the sacraments. Sister Dorothy Ann also organized tutoring in reading for students at area elementary schools.

Sister Dorothy Ann wrote a children's book entitled, "Bitsy Bee with the Allergy"; the book was illustrated by Sister Theresa Dietz. Proceeds from the sale of the book were given to help educate girls in Africa.

As Sister Dorothy Ann approached her 90th year, she wrote, "Mine has been a wonderful adventure on this earth, and I continually experience the wonders of people and nature. How great is our God!" To bring a sense of wonder to others, she imagined and brought to reality a "cosmic walk" through the woods of St. Mary's. She involved the Balser family in establishing a well at the end of the walk, providing a place for prayer.

During her last year, her health failed with causes that tests could not determine nor medicines could cure. Sister Gemma Marie Dittle, who during the last six decades had lived in several communities and taught in several schools with Dorothy Ann tells us, "She regretted her loss of energy, yet now as during all her life, her prayer was, 'Your will be done.' In the events of each day, she saw God's plan for her."

A memorial Eucharistic Celebration for Sister Dorothy Ann was on Monday, February 5. Rev. Brian Kaski, pastor St. Alphosus Parish in McComb, Mississippi, was the celebrant. Sister Dorothy Ann requested a natural burial, the first in the southern part of the Central Pacific Province. The burial took place on Tuesday, January 30, at St. Mary of the Pines Cemetery in Chatawa, Mississippi. Sister Dorothy Ann was preceded in death by her parents and five of her siblings. She is survived by her sister, Beverly Gent and three brothers: John (Virginia), Richard (Katie) and Reverend Edward Balser.

By Sister MarieClare Powell, SSND