



In Loving Memory

Sister Elizabeth Nabholz

Sister Elizabeth Nabholz, 97, died Wednesday, February 14, 2018, at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi. She was born in Conway, Arkansas, to Emil and Mary (Stack) Nabholz, the second of 12 children.

Elizabeth wrote little of her childhood. However, the following program excerpt from Sister Elizabeth's golden jubilee provides some insight into her fondest childhood memories:

“Included in today's gifts to the Lord are articles that symbolize Sister Elizabeth's life:

Cotton, representing her Arkansas home, a cotton farm;
St. Joseph, her home parish;
Mary, symbolizing the School Sisters of Notre Dame;
a schoolhouse, for her gift of teaching;
the Bible and her Rule Book;
and stitchery and playing cards, her hobbies.”

The Nabholz children were not to be expected in school during the opening weeks of the academic year, for they were picking cotton. However, along with other children of cotton farmers, the Lachowskys and the Siebenmorgens, they were among the highest achievers in their classes. Sister Herman Marie Siebenmorgen, SSND, relates the learners' routines: “Each week we collected assignments for home study and returned the finished lessons to the sisters. Along with picking cotton and learning each child had a unique responsibility on a family farm. Elizabeth's was milking cows each morning before school.”

Elizabeth progressed easily through the St. Joseph Parish elementary and secondary schools. She was greatly impressed by her teachers, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She recalled, “From the first grade I wanted to be a sister. I can't recall ever thinking otherwise.”

Upon graduation from high school in 1937, Elizabeth honored Mary, mother of Jesus, as she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame at Sancta Maria in Ripa in St. Louis. On her reception into the congregation, Elizabeth was given the name Mary Emile, an adaptation of her father's name. After profession of vows in 1941, she completed her studies for a B.A. at St. Louis University. Her first regular education assignment was as science, math and religion teacher for students at Notre Dame High School in Quincy, Illinois. Similar assignments took her to Freeburg and Westphalia in Missouri and to Belleville, Illinois.

In 1955, Sister Elizabeth responded to Jesus' directive, “Go teach all nations!” She had previously volunteered to teach the predominately African-American children in Kinloch, Missouri, but was not assigned there. She volunteered to teach in Japan, responding to a need for teachers at a mission that had recently been opened by SSND. She taught and served in administration at Notre Dame High School in Kyoto and at Christ the King School in Okinawa. When the SSNDs were to leave a mission there, a colleague testified, “Her loving and understanding relationship was manifested by the harmony between teachers and the students and their parents.” She had served 21 years in Asia.

continued

Birth
February 22, 1920

Baptism
February 25, 1920

Profession
August 1, 1941

Death
February 14, 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

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On her return to the States in 1976, Sister Elizabeth prepared to teach in a new setting with a new emphasis — parish ministry. The Bible was central to her ministry to children and adults during the next 25 years. To Our Lady of the Valley Parish in Phoenix, Sister Elizabeth brought her inspirational and gracious presence, as she trained and directed catechists, led study groups and visited the homebound and those who were in prison. A member of her catechetical training group expressed the thought of many others with whom and for whom she served: “You were so kind and gracious to me and I wish that every new coordinator would have a chance to meet you.” Elizabeth moved from Phoenix into similar parish ministries in Texarkana and Abilene, Texas.

Teaching in all its forms was Sister Elizabeth’s life interest and her ministry. Leisure was also important to her. She loved to walk, contemplating the presence of God in nature. She also enjoyed singing, card playing and needlework and was an avid reader. One of her community members, noting her prolific reading habit observed, “You read so many books; you should write your own.” And she did. At least she started a novel but destroyed it some years later. But while in Japan, she authored a work—a biography of Mother Theresa Gerhardinger—for the Japanese sisters.

The golden Jubilee celebration following her several years of ministry in Abilene elicited the offertory symbols listed above. During the celebration, Sister Elizabeth stated, “As I renew my religious vows this morning, I will use the formula of our religious congregation, and I intend to live out my vows in a spousal relationship with you, the mystical Body of Christ.”

It was just a few years after this Jubilee celebration and shortly before the turn of the century that Sister Elizabeth felt her health declining. After semi-retirement in Abilene, she fully retired in 2003. With her long-time ministry companion and community member, Sister Mary Brian Overfield, SSND, she came to St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Mississippi.

On an earlier birthday that had marked her approach to retirement age, Elizabeth contemplated, “How many more years of life are left to me here on earth? What will this year bring? Let me have the grace to live each day well, living through love in God’s presence.”

For 15 more birthdays, she was a cheerful member of the retirement community in Chatawa. Even as her health gradually failed and her memory challenges increased, she was a pleasant participant in as many community activities as her condition allowed. A companion during her early years at Chatawa described her, as many through her lifetime observed, “Elizabeth is a gentle, smiling, gracious lady with clever repartee and always present with the community.” Her smile held true to the end, though her frailty gradually restricted her participation in activities. Two weeks before her 98th birthday, Sister Elizabeth went peacefully before us. It was Ash Wednesday. It was also on Valentine’s Day that her heart opened completely through love to her Creator’s eternal presence.

Visitation and a morning prayer service were held Thursday, February 19, followed by the funeral liturgy. Burial was in the Chatawa Cemetery.

By Sister Carol Nishke, SSND