



In Loving Memory

Sister Joan (Vernon Marie) Bellew, SSND

Shirley Joan Bellew was born on June 26, 1937, in Fort Madison, Iowa. The family of Vernon and Cecelia (Krumpelman) Bellew welcomed her as their first born. One brother and three sisters were to follow.

Shirley felt a very normal and integral part of her wholesome family. Admiration for her simple, honest, deeply religious grandmother played a major role in the family and she was a model for Shirley. Shirley and her siblings attended Sacred Heart Elementary School and the Catholic High School in Fort Madison, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Shirley's high school years sparked a minor crisis in the family. Attraction to the School Sisters of Notre Dame began when, with an eighth grade group, she visited the motherhouse in St. Louis. A call she felt to attend high school as an aspirant in St. Louis met with a firm "no" from her parents. Again when her best friend became a candidate after their junior year of high school, her parents refused to grant permission for Shirley to follow. Only on graduation from high school did her parents concede though they still did not approve.

Shirley entered the candidature on June 18, 1955. The stronger opposition of her father remained as he refused to visit or even to send a message on the occasion of her reception into the congregation on August 1, 1956 and her religious profession on August 3, 1957 as Sister Vernon Marie.

For two years after profession, S. Vernon Marie pursued a bachelor degree at Notre Dame College in St. Louis. Then she was assigned to teach science and math at Redemptorist High School in New Orleans, LA. Similar assignments followed at St. Anthony High School in Effingham, IL and St. Gerard High School in San Antonio, Texas. S. Vernon Marie's life took a new turn when she was assigned to another Texas community in 1969. She was to teach high school students as usual. But the late August illness of the principal and superior of the Tyler Catholic community precipitated her re-assignment. Since it was a school of just 200 students, she was to fill the position of both administrator and teacher.

She received a bachelor's degree in mathematics in 1960 from the former Notre Dame College, St. Louis and a master's degree in education in 1973 from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio.

Her last school assignment in the former Dallas Province was to Sacred Heart High School in Morrilton, Arkansas. Here she was again both principal and teacher. It was a rural community in a state that was less than 5% Catholic. Though she had earlier volunteered for the SSND mission in Ghana, West Africa, she now resolved to let Arkansas be her "foreign mission." She remained there for 10 years, until 1984.

Birth
June 26, 1937

Baptism
July 4, 1937

Profession
August 3, 1957

Death
January 1, 2017

Burial
Sancta Maria in Ripa
Cemetery
St. Louis, Missouri

*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

continued

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Then, two anniversaries brought life-assessing times--her silver jubilee as a religious woman was celebrated and a quarter century of teaching was completed. Added to this was the SSND's imminent termination of ministry at the Morrilton mission. Discernment time for the whole community brought her to request time for renewal and service at St. Mary of the Pines retirement and retreat center in Chatawa, Mississippi. S. Joan found she was very comfortable and satisfied with the retired community of Sisters in Chatawa and the experience seemed mutual. So when the opening for Local Leader of the SSND community in Chatawa was announced, she volunteered. She assessed her time among our sisters there, "These years at Chatawa with my sisters have touched me deeply. They have taught me so much about living and dying. I know that within a year or two, I will be moving on from Chatawa. I feel that I need to look at Ghana again and see if this is where God is leading me."

S. Joan did look at Ghana again. In June 1990, she was missioned to Notre Dame Clinic, Nsawam, Ghana. The following year, she became headmistress at Notre Dame Secondary School in Sunyani, Ghana.

Returning to the United States in 1997, she was a substitute teacher at Aquinas High School, Fort Madison, Iowa for a year. This was followed by 11 years at Notre Dame High School in Burlington, Iowa. In 2009, she became a caregiver for her mother. Following the death of her mother, S. Joan was a volunteer at Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Osage Beach, Missouri. As her health deteriorated, she moved to The Sarah Community in 2016. She died peacefully at DePaul Hospital, Bridgeton, Missouri around 7:45 p.m. on New Year's Day, January 1, 2017.

S. Joan chose to be cremated. A prayer service was held at The Sarah Community on January 12. Due to an impending ice storm, the funeral liturgy was rescheduled for January 27. Monsignor Marion Makarewicz, pastor at Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Osage Beach, Missouri was the presider. Burial was in the Ripa cemetery. Relatives, classmates, parishioners from Our Lady of the Lake Parish and SSNDs came together to celebrate her life.

S. Joan was preceded in death by her parents. She is survived by her brother Mike (Joy) Bellew of Fort Madison, Iowa; her sisters Patty (Bob) Shores of New London, Iowa; Jan (Rudy) Waddle of Milo, Iowa; and Ann (Eric) Burghdorf of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

S. Joan loved teaching secondary school youth "who were so energetic and so willing to explore with her the truths and the mysteries of mathematics, religion and science." She was a fun-loving, mischievous and prayerful person. During her short time at The Sarah Community, she initiated a centering prayer group even though she was experiencing great pain in her back and could no longer walk. As she begins eternal life and anticipates her diamond jubilee, may she rejoice in the blessings that God has prepared for her!

By S. Marie Clare Powell and S. Carol Marie Wildt