



## *In Loving Memory*

### Sister M. Richelle Williams

The oldest of five children was born to Helen (Vuchich) and Verdell Williams on December 6, 1939, at St. Joseph's Hospital in Alton, Illinois. She was baptized at St. Bernard Church in Wood River, Illinois, on December 30, 1939, and named Mary Verdena. The following year, the family moved into a new home in the Cottage Hills area. A brother and three sisters would complete the family.

When Mary was ready for kindergarten, her parents sent her to the nearest Catholic school, St. Mary, in Alton, Illinois. Here, she met the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). Because the school was seven miles away and due to transportation issues, Mary was usually at school very early in the morning and until five in the evening. She enjoyed this extra time helping the sisters clean the classrooms and work in the sacristy. This relationship with the sisters fostered the seed of a religious vocation. In the seventh grade, Mary learned about the motherhouse at Sancta Maria in Ripa in St. Louis and made her first visit there. The next year, she applied to enter the aspiranture. After three and a half years, she had completed the required courses for her secondary education at Notre Dame High School, St. Louis, and was offered the opportunity to enter the candidature in January.

Mary received the candidate's veil at her home parish, Our Lady Queen of Peace, in Bethalto, Illinois, on January 5, 1957. The next day, she returned to the motherhouse and began her college courses. She was received into the novitiate on July 29, 1958, and given the name, Mary Richelle. She professed first vows on July 30, 1959, and final vows on July 30, 1965.

Sister Richelle was awarded a bachelor's degree in Latin from the former Notre Dame College, St. Louis, in 1961. She also received a master's degree in Latin/Greek in 1965 and a doctoral degree in Latin/Greek in 1969 from St. Louis University. In 1971, she received a Fulbright grant for a summer seminar in Italy for American teachers of Latin and Greek.

Sister Richelle taught secondary students at Duchesne High School, St. Charles, Missouri, and college students at Notre Dame College, St. Louis. While on the faculty at the former Notre Dame College, she was also Dean of Students for two years. In 1972, she was missioned to be local leader at the SSND Generalate in Rome. When she returned to St. Louis, she became director of the archdiocesan Cuban refugee program and later the director of Catholic Charities' Dial Help information and referral service.

In 1986, Sister Richelle was appointed local leader at Villa Gesu, a former retirement home in St. Louis. After a sabbatical, she became the director of retirement for the former St. Louis province and helped plan the new retirement center for the sisters, The Sarah Community, in Bridgeton, Missouri. When the sisters moved to The Sarah Community in 1999, Sister Richelle was asked to serve in Gorizia, Italy, as a provincial councilor and local leader of the motherhouse. When she returned to St. Louis, she became the coordinator of

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Birth  
December 6, 1939

Baptism  
December 30, 1939

Profession  
July 30, 1959

Death  
May 12, 2021

Burial  
Sancta Maria in Ripa  
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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spiritual life services at The Sarah Community for four years. For the next 10 years, she was a staff member at The Sarah Community. In 2014, she moved to Veronica House at The Sarah Community. Two years later, her health needs required her to move to Anna House. After a brief hospitalization, Sister Richelle died peacefully at Anna House early in the morning on May 12, 2021, while sisters kept watch with her.

A wake service was held at The Sarah Community on May 18, 2021. The following morning, viewing and funeral services were held at Theresa Center. Following the reading of her biography and the sharing of memories, the Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated with Rev. Ralph Parthie, OFM, as president. The reflection after the Gospel was written by her classmate and friend, Sister Phyllis Ann Price. Her sister-in-law, Jean Williams of Okawville, Illinois, nieces, nephews, classmates, friends and SSND were in attendance. Burial was in the Sancta Maria in Ripa Cemetery, St. Louis.

Sister Richelle was preceded in death by her parents; her brother, Richard; and her sisters Ann (Charles) Anderson, Jacqueline (Sylvan) Thaxton and Cecilia (Kim) Meyer.

Sister Richelle had a deep love for her family and they for her, which was evident at the funeral services. She was gifted with a brilliant mind, yet humbly shared her wisdom with others. She was an excellent linguist with a world vision. A joyful, calm and kind woman, she was ready to assist wherever help was needed. Her leadership skills enabled her to successfully carry out the responsibilities she was given. She was a welcoming presence, whether she ministered in an international community or with the elderly and retired. She had a great love and empathy for the poor and for refugees coming into another culture. A compassionate person, she suffered her own limitations with a cheerful gracefulness. May Sister Richelle now rejoice with her God, her family members and SSND who have gone before her into eternal life!

*By Sister Carol Marie Wildt, SSND*

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