



## *In Loving Memory*

### Sister Mary Lester deBlanc

**M**arie Louise de Blanc was born in New Orleans, on November 20, 1930, to Alma (Fuhr) and Lester Paul de Blanc. She was baptized in St. Alphonsus Church and attended the Redemptorist schools in that parish from first through the twelfth grades. In all of these years she and her older sister, Jeanne, were taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

In the following, Sister Lester told most of her own story with her characteristic mix of humor and seriousness. MaWezie, as Sister Lester was affectionately known to family and friends, sketched some early years in this short account, “In the fourth grade I had the lead role in the school play, ‘Hansel and Gretel.’ And from then I knew I wanted to go to Hollywood and also become a School Sister of Notre Dame. My parents, however, had other ideas for me which did not include Hollywood. Their strong religious faith and practices—like taking us to daily Mass during Lent, all kneeling at night time to pray— had a big influence in my decision to become an SSND rather than answer the Hollywood call.”

Just a few years later her call to serve God in religious life was refined and focused, “My strongest and most serious desire came when I met my seventh grade teacher, Sister Clarea Hotze. And what a teacher she was! Her words and her powerful example helped me know that I wanted to be just like her.”

Two months after graduation in 1947, Marie Louise, with five other classmates—a remarkable number from one school class— received the candidate’s bonnet in the sisters’ chapel on Josephine Street. Two days later the six of them boarded the train for St. Louis. Spiritual formation and professional study followed at Sancta Maria in Ripa. As a candidate Marie Louise had a taste of teaching—and loved it—at St. Anthony School in Baton Rouge. After the candidature and novitiate, in 1950 she began her vowed life as Sister Mary Lester.

Sister Lester retired from regular classroom teaching exactly 50 years later in 2000. In the course of those years she had written, “I plan to remain in teaching as long as I am physically able. Some say I am a born teacher, I don’t know about that, but this I know, I will die a teacher!” For help in becoming the outstanding educator and administrator she was, she expressed her gratitude for community, “I was fortunate enough to live with and learn from other good SSNDs who willingly shared their expertise with me.”

For two years, Lester taught primary grade children in Missouri and California. However, from then on she found her natural niche with junior high youth. Elaborating on this match, she explained, “This group needs a teacher with a sense of humor, of caring, one who listens to them. They might be big in size, but they are still little children, eager for learning and guidance.”

Lester designed the language arts and religion subject matter of her classes to meet the needs of those youth. She told of the ‘lagniappe’ offered, “My love of sports and avid following of the New Orleans Saints and LSU football teams stood me in good stead with this group.” A former student was quoted on the front page of a Times Picayune Sunday special section, The Mission of

**Birth**  
November 20, 1930

**Baptism**  
November 30, 1930

**Profession**  
July 29, 1950

**Death**  
March 12, 2017

**Burial**  
Chatawa Cemetery  
Chatawa, Mississippi

*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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October, “We benefitted from having a baseball-minded principal. Her name was Sister Mary Lester. She let everybody come to the auditorium to watch the game. When the bell rang all the girls left; the boys stayed; Sister Mary Lester too.”

Sister Lester had a listening heart not only for her students but also her staff. Another fifty-year veteran told of Sister Lester saving her to the profession. As a first year discouraged teacher she experienced Sister’s guidance through her sympathetic listening.

Lester still taught for one year in an ‘80s as she stepped from the K-8 school to “train others to confront crooked political leaders and cause a change to benefit poor people. The sponsoring group was the Texas Metropolitan Organization in Houston.”

A volunteer Lester was. Summers often found her at the switchboard or driving for the Sisters at Chatawa. She explained, “This did allow me some discretionary time to make real my Hollywood dream. I auditioned for and was chosen to play the part of the maid in the drama, Anniversary Waltz produced by the Brookhaven Little Theatre.”

After her retirement from teaching in school, she was receptionist at Archbishop Hannan High School, located then in Chalmette. The powerful hurricane, Katrina did some of its worst damage in Chalmette. Lester and her community member, Sister Dot Maniscalco now had to wait for their home to be rebuilt.

An activities director position opened through the Council on Aging in Chalmette. Lester’s delightful person-to-person interaction and her organizational skills made her a natural for this position. Because the joy of her humor added to her drama inclination, there was many an invitation to perform her Cajun readings and jokes.

However, physical diminishment was taking its toll. It was with a painful heart that, in December of 2013, Sisters Lester and Dot left Chalmette. Their associates and friends feted their many years of service there. Lester noted of their arrival at St. Mary of the Pines, “The tremendous warm welcome by our Sisters here helped ease the pain. We are happy now in our ministry of prayer and presence. I am at peace and loving every minute of each day. As Scripture says, ‘Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found!’ Yes, God is here EVERYDAY in those who care for us.”

Sister Lester was able to be with the community for all activities during the next two years. A rather sudden event incapacitated her physically, but not her humorous, grateful spirit. Sister Mary Lester de Blanc died early morning, March 12, 2017, at St. Mary of the Pines. Her perceptive prediction was on target. For all who observed this spirit in the last months, she really did “die a teacher.” May Sister Lester shine for all eternity.

A former student Father Rodney Bourg was the celebrant and a classmate Father Laurence Phelps, OSB was con-celebrant for the Mass of Christian Burial. Father Suresh Thirmalareddy, pastor of St. Teresa Parish also con-celebrated. Burial was in the Chatawa Cemetery. Sister Lester’s parents and her sister preceded her in death.

*By Sister Carol Nishke, SSND*