

In Loving Memory

Sister Richard Marie Burke, SSND

Magdalena Clare Burke was born in New Orleans, to Richard and Magdalen (Escher) Burke on October 25, 1924.

Magdalena was the sixth child, but the first daughter of the nine children born to this close-knit family. The Burkes were socially and politically active members of the area known as the Irish Channel in New Orleans. The Redemptorist Parishes embraced the Channel and the Burkes. The Burkes' loyalty was life-long to these institutions. Magdalena, also known as Mat, along with her sister Alice and her seven brothers, attended elementary and secondary schools in the parish.

Magdalena related that from the time of her confirmation, she was sure that she wanted to enter the convent. Since her teachers, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, were nearly the only religious she knew, the choice of a congregation was not difficult for her.

For her parents it was another matter. In 1941, war was looming over the country. Mr. Burke, in particular, saw that his close-knit family was soon to unravel. The boys were quickly growing into military service age, and within a span of a few years, would serve their country overseas. Mrs. Burke thought that the sisters influenced Mat too much. Her concern was alleviated more easily by Mat's persistence. Magdalena wrote, "Getting the needed permission from my parents and separating myself from them, from my only sister, and from my seven brothers was no easy task for me."

On a summer evening in 1941, Magdalena and three other young women received the bonnet of a candidate in the sisters' chapel on Josephine Street in New Orleans. On the following Sunday, the three new candidates left by train for St. Louis.

Mat continued her formation spiritually, professionally and educationally in the candidature, at Notre Dame College and at Sancta Maria in Ripa. In 1943, she received the habit and a new name. Magdalena, who had received her mother's name in baptism, would now be known by her father's name. To the community, she was now "Sister Richard Marie."

After her profession of vows in 1944, Sister Richard Marie began her life ministry of helping others. Her teaching was mostly in traditional classrooms and schools. She also ministered to the orphans at Madonna Manor, with young women considering a religious vocation, in the aspiranture at St. Mary of the Pines and with adults in the high school equivalency program. Religious and lay colleagues benefitted from her educational leadership in the communities and the schools.



Birth
October 25, 1924

Baptism
November 9, 1924

Profession
July 28, 1944

Death
November 5, 2017

Burial
St. Mary of the Pines
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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**School Sisters
of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD
THROUGH EDUCATION

A community member who lived in community with Sister Richard Marie tells us, “She was always energetic in her ministry, friendly and welcoming to the sisters in community, with the faculty and staff. She was generous with her time, willing to help wherever she could.”

Sister Richard Marie taught in social studies and religion classes in elementary and secondary schools in Missouri, Illinois and Louisiana. She was a local leader, principal and administrator, while continuing to teach in the classroom.

When the congregation leadership needed someone for special campus positions, Sister Richard Marie’s generous, gracious and welcoming spirit was an ideal match. She was called on to be spirant directress and later administrator at St. Mary of the Pines in the mid-1960s. When a community coordinator was sought at the Dallas Provincial House, she filled the role for five years. She also accepted a similar invitation to coordinate the jubilee programs in the Rome Generalate for two summers.

It was after five years of coordinating the Dallas Provincial community that Sister Richard Marie returned to her last stint in a traditional school. As of all her educational endeavors, an observer in Pascagoula noted, “Sister Richard Marie has a stabilizing effect in the school. She energizes the students to be respectful, caring citizens in their school and in their community.”

After 10 years as leader in Resurrection School and community in Pascagoula, Sister Richard Marie was given a sabbatical year. She was grateful to be able to spend this time helping her family, including her brother, Paul, who had recently lost his wife and needed assistance in caring for his disabled daughter.

Sister Richard Marie then looked to needs in the area and found a new calling as she instructed adults in the Progressive Education Program in New Iberia, Louisiana. These adults needed help acquiring high school certification. She helped prepare them to continue their education or to find a career.

Sister Richard Marie came to St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Mississippi, in 2008. Always faithful to being with the community in prayer and in play, she sought new ways to serve. She found her niche as she coordinated library services. As usual, she involved others in new ways. It was from the library desk that she was rushed to the hospital with a medical event that affected her speech and limited her movement. For Sister Richard Marie, who was a great communicator and conversationalist, this was a major challenge that persisted and worsened for the next few years until the time of her not surprising, but still unexpected, death on Sunday, November 5.

Sister Richard Marie was preceded in death by her parents, her sister and her seven brothers. She is survived by many nieces and nephews.

This remembrance was prepared by Sister MarieClare Powell, SSND