

SISTER MARY CHARLES REILLY

Of the Queen of the Holy Rosary



December 14, 1915 - July 23, 2009

Eulogy

*“Come, blessed of my Father, take possession
of the kingdom prepared for you.”*

Mt. 25: 34

Having taken turns keeping vigil at Sister Mary Charles’ bedside following her anointing by Father Jeff Finley, CPPS., our Motherhouse Chaplain, and the singing of the *Salve* by the community, on Thursday morning, July 23, 2009 we were amazed she took off for Heaven that night shortly after 10:00 p.m. After struggling all day to breathe, her breathing became even more rapid and shallow in the evening. While Sister Carolyn Marie Monahan was keeping watch at her bedside, our patient was breathing more normally after the nurses repositioned her. At 10:08 p.m. she surprised Sister Carolyn by gently breathing her last breath. Sisters Mary Jarlath McGrath, Jennifer Daniels and Shirley Gador, a close friend of Sister Mary Charles, were summoned immediately and said the prayers for a departing soul. Sister Mary Charles had slipped off to Heaven as gently as she had lived.

Sister Mary Charles was born in Portland, Oregon, on December 14, 1915, to Marie Ginty and Patrick Reilly and was baptized on January 1, 1916, at Immaculate Heart Church and given the name Mary Agnes. Both her parents were born in Ireland: Patrick in County Leitrim and Marie in County Mayo. Patrick died of ptomaine poisoning when Mary Agnes was five years old. Her mother married Mr. Walsh who had four children: Martin, William, Edward and Mary Frances, also known as “Queenie,” who grew up with Mary Agnes. Always very close to her mother, she

was nicknamed her “Darling.” In her later years her mother moved to San Francisco and lived her last years at Madonna House. It was her mother who supported her nephew, Monsignor James Flynn, while he was in the seminary.

Mary Agnes grew up in the Portland area and attended Holy Rosary Elementary School and Immaculata Academy, both schools staffed by our Dominican Sisters. Her musical talent was developed by our Sister Cyrilla Poschmann who was her piano teacher. She enjoyed singing and playing the piano at school performances. Mary Agnes loved everything Irish and often danced in Irish costumes at Hibernia celebrations.

Responding to the call of the Lord, Mary Agnes entered our Congregation with her good friend, Aloysia Techtman, now known as Sister Emilia, on August 30, 1934, at our Motherhouse in Mission San Jose. She wrote the following about her vocation: “My Dominican teachers, particularly Sister Bernard Cline (my first O.P. Sister I had ever seen) was my second grade teacher at Holy Rosary School in Portland. The other special teachers were Sisters Loretto Shafer, Rufina Doran, Rosarita Duggan and Rita Murphy. These Sisters influenced me to enter the convent because of the joy they had in living the life: also the thoughtfulness, kindness and concern they had for one another in their everyday life. I could feel and see they were women who prayed much and practiced what they preached.”

Mary Agnes received the habit on June 3, 1935, and was given the name of Sister Mary Charles of the Queen of the Holy Rosary. She made her first profession of vows on August 12, 1936 and her Final Vows on August 12, 1942. In preparation for her teaching career she received her BA from Queen of the Holy Rosary College at Mission San Jose, took courses at Dominican College, San Rafael, and gained her teaching credential in 1955. In 1971 she received a Masters Degree in Education from Holy Names College with a Concentration in Reading.

Sister Mary Charles was an excellent primary grade teacher and loved her work with little children. As a second grade teacher she cherished the privilege of training her young pupils for their First Confession and First Holy Communion.

Blest with a sweet, gentle manner and a charming Irish smile, Sister drew children and others to her. Always loving, kind and patient with a good listening ear, she sought out the needy, shy and lonely. Sister Mary Henry Williges recalls her warm hospitality and generosity when she visited at Immaculate Conception Priory to prepare for the Dominican Guild Christmas Boutique. Sister Mary Charles was the receptionist and made her feel so welcome. Always a gracious hostess, she would go to the high school auditorium during the day to bring Sister Mary Henry a cup of coffee and a sweet roll.

Sister served her Sisters as superior at St. Joseph's in Portland and St. Frances Cabrini in San Jose and community treasurer at St. Ignatius in Los Angeles and St. Frances Cabrini in San Jose. During her 45 years as a primary teacher, she had eighteen assignments in 14 of our schools in California and Oregon. She had three assignments to St. James School and two at St. Boniface in San Francisco and two at St. Frances Cabrini in San Jose. She spent five years in Southern California at San Gabriel Mission and St. Ignatius Schools. She also taught at St. Albert's Ukiah and St. Vincent's, San Rafael, The School of the Madeleine, Berkeley; St. Elizabeth, Oakland; and St. William's in Los Altos. In her later years she served as receptionist at Immaculate Conception Priory and as a tutor and librarian at St. James School.

Her friend for many years, Shirley Gador, considered Sister Mary Charles as a part of her family including her in many family celebrations. Shirley also took Sister on many trips to countries around the world. It was her visit to Ireland that was the highlight as Sister was able to visit her first cousin there and it allowed her to steep herself in the Irish culture she loved so much. Shirley recalled that it was either at St. William's in Los Altos or St. Frances Cabrini, in San Jose, that the parents provided Sister with a ride in a hot air balloon at Morgan Hill! She was a brave lady to accept that invitation!

Good health was a blessing Sister Mary Charles enjoyed for many years; however, at the age of 85, while visiting with Shirley Gador, she suffered a heart attack but recovered, thanks to Shirley's quick action in getting her to the Emergency Room for treatment. As dementia set in, Sister was transferred to St. Martin's Residence in 2001. Gradually unable to care for herself, she was

patient, grateful and never complained. On Thursday, July 23, 2009 Sister Mary Charles gently surrendered her beautiful soul to her Lord. May she rest in the eternal embrace of His great love for her.

--Sister Ellen Mary Cunningham