

# Remembering



Sister Mary Gregory Porterie, CSJ

August 24, 1925 — December 31, 2016

Sister Mary Gregory Porterie, baptized Grace Flavia, was born in Phoenix Arizona, on August 24, 1925. Her parents were Louis Alexander Porterie, who was also born in Phoenix, and her mother, Jewell Alpha Kennedy, from Albertsville, Alabama. Grace, Sister Mary Gregory, was the oldest of three children. Her sister, Francis Yvonne, was named for Francis of Assisi and she was taught to spell her name with an "i". Francis is deceased. Urban Louis, her brother, lived in Phoenix, and is also deceased. A nephew, Glenn Woodmansee is from Chula Vista, and Glenn's older sister is Cecilia Hinds, from Tonopah, Arizona.

Sister entered religious life on January 15, 1944, and went out to teach on January 20 at St. John the Evangelist School. She received the habit on March 19, 1945, made first profession on March 19, 1947, final vows on August 15, 1950. In

2015 Sister proudly celebrated her 70th Jubilee.

Hers was a pioneer family. In 1860 her grandmother, Maria Jessica Hancock, was born in Tucson and moved to Phoenix before Phoenix was declared a city in 1871. Her grandfather was born in Auch, France. His grandmother raised him while his father was a soldier the French conquering wars around 1870's. This grandfather, Joseph Alexander, learned 7 languages while studying in a monastery school. Eventually he traveled to Baton Rouge, toured the Atlantic coast and then the Pacific Coast by horseback. In Phoenix he met and married Mary Jessica, Sister's grandmother. Sister Mary Gregory had many interesting stories about her family. For example, when her grandmother was 8 years old and her family moved from Tucson to Phoenix, they rode in an open flatboard wagon. On the way,

a desert thunderstorm came up. Lightening struck the little friend next to her grandmother and killed her. This was always a source of mystery and wonderment why she was spared. Her grandmother was very religious and had special devotion to St. Francis Xavier.

Sister Mary Gregory attended St. Mary's Grammar and High School in Phoenix, taught by the Sisters of Precious Blood. Before high school graduation, half of her class had already enlisted in the military for World War II. Sister worked part time at a drug store fountain to earn money for nursing school. Not wanting to attend in Phoenix, she heard about "some real nice Sisters in Tucson at St. Mary's Hospital" She applied and was close to being accepted. One day, while working at the fountain, some Sisters came in, they were friendly and from out of town. They wore habits and carried sack lunches, but wanted ice cream or cold drinks. She was shocked and surprised to learn they were from St. Mary's in Tucson! These Sisters were on the way to Prescott and had to wait for Sister Beatrice, who was at a meeting. Later that same day Sister Beatrice came in to the drug store to meet Sister Mary Gregory. Sister was accepted in the nursing program, attended for a semester and then entered religious life in Los Angeles.

As a true daughter of St. Joseph, there are no newspaper articles or especially notable honors bestowed on Sister. She was content to quietly work in the vineyard for almost 60 years as a teacher and Principal. Among her assignments in California, Sister was missioned to Los Angeles, San Diego, Manhattan Beach, Encino,

Lakeside, Oxnard, San Francisco and Bakersfield. She was also missioned to Prescott and Tucson in Arizona. "I watched the American Martyrs Church built brick by brick from my classroom window. One year there we had 120 graduates, a truck strike held up the desks for the second 8th grade and my desk was orange crates, the children used slatted tables from the auditorium." She once said, I loved every mission I had. The one I dreaded going to the most was the one where I cried the most when I left."

Sister was soft-spoken and not prone to attend social gatherings in later years. When she first arrived at Carondelet Center she took part in many activities. She was a wonderful community member, a reflective listener, a woman of integrity and personal prayer. Her unusually lovely eyes reflected a sparkle of intelligence, clarity and humor. Her expression was usually tranquil, her appearance calm and soothing. She was dependable and sincere in her relationships. She was gentle by nature, nice to be around, as well as efficient and capable. She especially liked truth, punctuality and prudence. She disliked gushy sentiment, idleness. She was a practical person who avoided wishful thinking. As a teacher and Principal, Sister was a dependable and responsible person who was attuned to the feelings and needs of others. She was definite in her opinions and stuck by them.

Over ten years ago, in August 2003, Sister arrived at Carondelet Center to begin her ministry of prayer and witness. She indeed did this well. Often her TV was tuned to the chapel channel

with quiet meditative music. Her gracious smile welcomed guests into her space. Sister was among the first to be missioned to Holy Family Community.

Sister Mary Gregory, we offer our grateful thanks to God for all you quietly taught us, and the many ways you blessed us. Your gracious imprint will be left in the hearts and lives of many. ✞

*Written by Sister Frances Baker, CSJ*

