



Remembering

Sister Carmel Therese Gutierrez CSJ

May 3, 1929 — December 22, 2019

Maria and Ezequiel Gutierrez traveled with four of their children, Esther, Joseph, Carlos and Isidore from Michocan, Mexico to California, settling first in San Carlos, where two more sons, Ezequiel and Antonio, were born. Responding to the need for lumber-jacks in Yosemite, Ezequiel accepted the better paying job to care for his family. Then two more children, Ramona and Adolfo arrived. The family's last move was to Madera, CA, where Maria Theresa Angela was born, followed by two brothers, Ralph and Charles. Theresa described her family as large, but very close. Her parents instilled in their children a very strong work ethic of contributing not only to the family, but also to the agricultural community of Madera. Along with her brothers and sisters during the Depression years she spent summers picking grapes in the many vineyards of the Central Valley and in the winters picking cotton balls to be sent to the cotton gin machines. It was this family togetherness she loved. One of her favorite early

memories was of playing outside with her brothers and sisters until dinner time and family rosary every night. What she treasured was the special time the three youngest had with their mother as she put them to bed each night and taught them to pray.

Her first introduction to women religious was with the Company of Mary Sisters who taught CCD classes in the family home and the Dominicans, who taught in the parish school, St. Joachim's. However after her early years at Pershing Elementary, her father decided she should go to the parish school just as the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived to replace the Dominicans. Theresa did not want to leave her friends, but soon she didn't mind because, in her own words, "Life at school with the five new sisters were happy ones."

During her years at St. Joachim's she became active along with her brothers and sisters... singing in the choir, sports' teams and all other aspects of parish life. Her parents too were examples of involved

parishioners. Although her father worked in the lumber industry, he was always on duty to work in the Parish and School. Her mother served as the secretary for many years. She described her growing up in Madera as living in an environment dominated by the life and traditions of the early Italian settlers. She learned to speak Italian to add to her Spanish and English and even had an understanding of French due to the influence of her French grandmother. She found these skills as assets later in life when she traveled to Italy in 1989. She also referred to her study and travel in New York as "a delight for a country girl."

It was no surprise when she told her parents she wanted to be a Sister of St. Joseph. On September 15, 1950 she traveled to Los Angeles, California to enter the postulate at St. Mary's Academy with forty-nine other young women. The following March 19, 1951 she received the habit and the name Sister Carmel Therese. First vows were pronounced on March 18, 1953; final vows on August 6, 1958 in the chapel of Mount St. Mary's College.

She earned her Bachelor's degree from Mount Saint Mary's College and obtained California's lifetime elementary credential. When she spoke of her life experiences, she said she had spent her years "always teaching something to somebody." She would gather little children and teach them their prayers even before teaching CCD classes in her parish with the Company of Mary Sisters. Later in life she taught housekeeping skills. Her first classroom teaching experience as a Sister of St. Joseph was in 1953 at St. James School, Redondo Beach CA. She spent

her next 30 years teaching in elementary schools, not only in California, but also in Washington and Arizona. In 1984 she volunteered for a very different experience as the Secretary-Assistant to the Coordinator of Religious Education in Kamloops, British Columbia. In 1986 she found herself in a new role as the Assistant for Hospitality and Housekeeping at Carondelet Center. During those years at the request of a neighbor she had met on her daily walks on Norman Place below Carondelet Center, she assisted in the housekeeping and child care for the family.

The next experiences of her life she called her "checkered career" as teaching in different ways. Needless to say her teaching skills were highly recognized at the Learning Skills Center in San Jose, CA and also in a program at San Jose City College. After those four years she moved to Pleasant Hill, CA, to help in child care at Concord House. The next change was to parish ministry in San Francisco at Star of the Sea Parish as the Parish Sister and then at St. Thomas Parish as Coordinator of Religious Education. In 2006 she moved to Concord, CA to live with many other CSJs in the Chateau Community. She volunteered not only as the Eucharistic Minister at John Muir Hospital, but also as a teacher of ESL at the Bayberry Care Center.

Early in her teaching career as a CSJ she was overjoyed to be assigned to her alma mater, St. Joachim's in Madera, but only for one year. However St. Joachim's did not forget her. In 2010 she returned to receive the Distinguished Graduate Award from the Department of Elementary Schools of the NCEA.

In a resume prepared for one of her job applications, her skills as a teacher were highlighted along with the extra-curricular activities she coordinated: theme weeks, outings, plays, musicals and athletic events. Former students, many with whom she kept in touch, have confirmed all of the above. In her classrooms they learned discipline, respect for one another and even what they expressed as "a quiet positive learning atmosphere within the classroom."

One former student recently told of remembering a Christmas poem Sister Carmel taught her in second grade, which she taught to her children and now her children are teaching to their children. Her former students were always in her prayers, especially the six who became priests and sisters.

In 2014 she returned to Carondelet Center as a member of Holy Family Community. She wanted to continue to be active. With her beautiful singing voice, she not only joined the choir, but encouraged others to join impromptu sing-alongs. When all were sure of the melodies, she would start harmonizing. Music was one of the beauties of her life. Almost every day she would help in the Development Office, with the mailings, preparations for the Boutique and other projects. She helped in setting up for Holy Family activities. For sisters who wanted company, she was a welcome visitor sometimes announcing her arrival with a song. Since the Development Office was at the far end of the building, she walked back and forth in the hallways daily, greeting everyone along the way.

When dementia became burdensome, she started wandering not only in the hallways, but down the

hill. It was not safe for her. She moved to St. John of God's memory care unit where she remained for a year. When she became much frailer, she returned to Carondelet Center for comfort care and the services of Vitas Hospice. She was up and about with assistance even attending some activities until she preferred to remain in her room. It was during the recent cold season that there were signs she was beginning her final journey. Her last illness was a short one. She died peacefully on December 22, 2019, three days before Christmas.

With the Psalmist we pray: "Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice!" Sister Carmel Therese has joined the heavenly choir to sing the harmony to God's melody which has been playing within her soul all of her life. Rest in peace and everlasting joy, dear Carmel. ❖

~ Sisters Frances Baker & Barbara Dugan, CSJ

