



Sister Claire Latham, CSJ

August 14, 1925 - June 19, 2022

Born in San Francisco, Claire Latham attended all twelve years of school at Star of the Sea. Her father, Arthur Joseph, was born in Stroud, Gloucester, England. Her mother, Clara W. Dieringer was born in Tacoma, Washington. Both parents strongly supported Catholic education, as evidenced by her years at Star of the Sea, graduating in 1943. Claire was the sixth of twelve children; Dorothy, Ruth, Grace, Art, Bill, Claire, Jan, Jim, Don, Paul, Ray and Tom. She greatly loved her family and maintained close ties with them. She was especially close to her nephew John Camp.

While attending high school she held part time jobs as secretary, receptionist, elevator operator and bookkeeper. Claire entered religious life at St. Mary's Academy on September 7, 1943, received the habit and religious name Sister Mary Grace. First vows were pronounced on March 15, 1946, final vows on August 15, 1949. In 1974 she returned to her baptismal name. In 2019 Claire celebrated her 75th Jubilee as a Sister of St. Joseph.

Claire received her B.A. degree from Mount St. Mary's College in 1957, and her M.A in Education Supervision in 1974 from the University of San Francisco. She was awarded three life credentials in Elementary Teaching, Educational Administration, and Library Science.

After first vows she was missioned to St. Joseph Childrens' Home in Culdesac, Idaho, in 1946. The school was actually a farm in Native American country for some 100 boys and girls, most of whom were from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds. Some students were orphans and wards of the State. This was a difficult mission for 21 year old Claire. The word Culdesac in French means "empty pockets", "bottom of the sack" or "dead end".

At Ascension School in Los Angeles in 1951, she taught more than seventy first graders, until the Fire Department demanded that the class be reduced to a more reasonable fifty-four students.

In 1952 she returned to Culdesac to teach K, 1, 2, in the morning and 6, 7, 8 in the afternoon! After serving 26 years as a teacher, and 12 years as principal, she was appointed to the Diocesan Office of Education in Portland, Oregon. Sister Claire ministered at fourteen schools or parishes in eleven cities extending from San Francisco to Culdesac, Idaho.

When Santa Maria Parish in Orinda, California celebrated their 50th anniversary as a parish in 2005, they recognized Sister for her twenty plus years of relationship with their parish community. She was the first principal of the school in 1960, and later served as the Director of Faith Formation.

In 1990 Sister attended the Weston School of Theology. At this time her awareness of justice issues was raised. One of the Scripture texts she especially liked was Psalm 9:9, "The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, strength in times of trouble." This psalm spoke to her of justice for all people. Claire found liberation in the Vatican II Documents, and in Scripture study. She came to believe women are equal to men, and that her life's task was to affirm others and rejoice in their good fortune.

In 1999, for four years, Claire resided at Star and was a family caregiver. In 2003 she began an Adult Bible Study group and continued to reside at Star. As her health failed she joined the Holy Family Community in July, 2006 to offer prayer and witness. Claire especially enjoyed the book club at Carondelet Center. Perhaps her training in library science gave her added interest in books and sharing. In 2021 Sister was among the first to transition to St. John of God Center from Carondelet Center, for more extensive care.

As one came to know Claire better, they discovered a sunny playfulness. While strong, dignified and determined, she also had a great love of teaching. She was astute, and yet could speak in a simple, straightforward manner. She was able to accept responsibility. Claire was thoughtful and hard-working, a person who preferred to stay at home, unless it meant connecting with family members.

Sister Claire died peacefully at St. John of God. Her death was a surprise to all. Claire had flourished at St. John Center, holding her own, participating in activities, and continuing significant correspondence with family and friends. Her greatest challenge was her desire to be more independent than she was able.

May she now rest in peace as she is reunited with her parents and nine of her twelve siblings, and her nephew Michael. Claire still has a large family on earth who will miss her presence with them. Her brothers, Tom and Ray, will especially miss her. Now may she now know the joy of heaven, belonging to one joyful family of believers.

~ Sister Frances Baker, CSJ