



Sister Gladys Murphy, SSND
May 12, 1932 – May 13, 2019



Wilton, Connecticut - Sister Gladys Murphy, SSND, died at Lourdes Health Care Center on May 13, 2019. She was a vowed member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for 65 years. She taught for nearly 40 years in Catholic schools, predominantly in New York City, Brooklyn and Astoria and, for a few years in Baltimore City, Fort Lee, N.J. and Malden, Mass. In addition to being a teacher, she was an avid runner completing 34 N.Y.C. marathons and two in Boston.

Natalie Mary Murphy was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, on May 12, 1932, the youngest of four children of Nathaniel John Murphy and Gladys Gertrude Davis, both natives of Boston. When she was three-and-a-half years old her mother died, the beginning of a very unsettled period in her life. She wrote later that her father was very restless after her mother's death and moved his family several times to other places in Massachusetts, and later to Albany, New York, eventually moving back to Roxbury. Natalie was in the fifth grade at the time and registered in Mission Grammar School; she remained to finish grade school and graduate from Mission High in 1951. From the first, Natalie felt at home at Mission, and she loved the Sisters, especially Sister Agathine, her sixth grade teacher. She credited her grade school years as fostering her first thoughts about becoming a sister.

After graduation, Natalie became a Candidate in Baltimore and taught third grade at St. James School. The following year, first grade was her mission at St. Joseph Monastery School in Baltimore. At Reception, on July 8, 1953, she was received as Novice Mary Gladys in honor of her mother. First vows followed in 1954, and she was sent to teach second grade at Sacred Heart School in Baltimore. In 1957, she renewed her vows, and from 1957 to 1959, she was missioned to St. Brigid School in Westbury, N.Y.

Sister Gladys had taught at Madonna School in Fort Lee, New Jersey; Immaculate Conception School in Malden, Massachusetts; and St. Alphonsus, Brooklyn, New York, where she spent five years. In 1969 she went to Our Lady of Perpetual Help School (OLPH) in New York City, where she remained until 1981, teaching grades five, six, and seven at various times. At OLPH, Gladys had "quite a bit of surgery," and the doctor

insisted she take a leave of absence, during which she taught at Our Lady of Sorrows School on the Lower East Side of New York. She also worked in the Archdiocesan School Office. In 1983, she went to live at St. Patrick's Convent in Long Island City, where she "spent five happy years with the Sisters of St. Joseph," and was Associate Administrator at Most Precious Blood School in Astoria. From 1988 – 1991, Gladys was on exclaustation in Brooklyn.

In 1989, the Principal of Most Holy Trinity School asked her to open a Pre-K class. Later she wrote, "My most memorable teaching was with the little ones in Pre-K. Decorating my classroom was always fun for me." This led her to take classes in ceramics, oil painting and stained glass.

Some of this work was on display during her wake and funeral. Also on display was a basket of medals and ribbons Gladys had received as a runner. She wrote fondly about this part of her life:

Probably the most life-changing event for me was being involved in the New York City Marathons over 34 years. When I lived at 62nd Street, I had angina and the doctor told me I needed to exercise. I saw people jogging along the East River. So I slowly started to do the same. One day while jogging, I met someone who told me about the New York Running Club, and I joined. After a year of running I signed up to do the 26.2 mile New York City Marathon. I did it in 6 hours and 20 minutes.

On an earlier, shorter race, Gladys was limping badly from pain in her heel. A man nearby told her to hop as he was doing, and she was able to finish the race. He was Dick Traum, an amputee and founder of the Achilles Track Club for Disabled Runners. Through his friendship and coaching, Gladys' running career took off. Later, as her health changed, she walked the races, and then in 2002 she started to use a hand-cranked wheelchair. This was a very difficult challenge, requiring a great deal of upper body strength. Numerous newspaper clippings show her, with Achilles friends accompanying her, as she crossed finish lines.

When she came to Villa Notre Dame in 1995, Gladys gave service in the Day Room that had been set up by the Pastoral Care Staff for Sisters with dementia. For "five rewarding years" she was very good at this ministry and loved it. Later she had many different responsibilities, as well as her baking.

Her Wake Service was held on May 14, and the Liturgy of Christian Burial was presided over by Father Tom Elliott, CSC, Villa Chaplain, on May 15. Burial followed at St. Mary

Cemetery, Bethel, Connecticut. A relative and several women from Achilles were present at the funeral.

Sister Connie Carrigan led the wake service with a description of Gladys' acceptance of her recent time in Lourdes. It ended with, "Gladys, you knew that winning wasn't the goal, it was how you ran that counted. You did win and now you have your prize."

Memorial contributions may be made to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic Midwest Province, c/o Development Office, 345 Belden Hill Road, Wilton, Conn. 06897 or online: www.amssnd.org