



Mary Elizabeth Burke, SSND
May 4, 1932 – Sept. 11, 2019



Baltimore – Sister Mary Elizabeth Burke died on Sept. 11, 2019 at Villa Assumpta. Sister Mary was a vowed member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for 67 years. She ministered as an educator and administrator in Baltimore City and across Maryland for more than 30 years.

Mary Elizabeth Burke was born in Roxbury, Mass. on May 4, 1932. Mary was the daughter of Patrick Henry and Elizabeth O'Donnell Burke. Patrick was a native of Boston, and Elizabeth was born in County Cork, Ireland. Mary's sister, Patricia, was born a year later. The Burke family attended Our Lady of Perpetual Help, "The Mission Church" in Roxbury, and Mary was baptized there on May 22, 1932.

Mary attended the grammar school taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame at Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish. She began first grade in Sept. 1937 and received her first Holy Communion on May 18, 1938. She was confirmed by the Right Rev. William T. McCarty, CSsR, a Bishop of the Military Ordinariate, on May 20, 1943.

After graduation from the eighth grade in 1945, Mary's greatest wish was "to enter the Juniorate and try out my vocation." Mary blossomed at Juniorate; she was proud of being there and became a leader. During those years at Fort Lee, Mary "became more firm" in her vocation and in her resolution to enter the candidature after graduation.

Mary received the bonnet on Aug. 29, 1949 in the convent chapel of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Roxbury. While a candidate, Mary taught first grade at Madonna School in Fort Lee, N.J. As those two years ended, Mary was "eagerly looking forward to reception with a great desire to receive the Holy Habit." Mary was given the name, Sister Mary Elisha and entered the novitiate on July 16, 1951. Sister Mary Elisha professed her first vows on Aug. 2, 1952.

Sister Elisha's first mission as a professed sister was teaching first grade at St. Michael's School, Frostburg, Md., where she remained for 10 years. Mary continued to teach at St. Matthew's School, Baltimore; St. Mark's School, Catonsville, Md.; and Sts. James and John School, Baltimore. She was principal at Blessed Sacrament School and St. Mary's,

Govans, both also in Baltimore. As an administrator, Mary conducted her schools with obvious affection and respect for the traditions of the school family and the community. She took great pleasure in sharing credit for achievements with parents.

Mary earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in History from the College of Notre Dame of Maryland (now University) in 1966.

In 1980, Mary became interested in pastoral care and worked in ministry and education in rural parishes in northern Georgia and Alabama. Mary and her dear friend and associate, Catherine (Kitty) Concannon, SSND, became both teacher and learner in a locale where Catholics comprised less than 1% of the population.

Mary's great sense of social justice contributed to this ministry of almost 20 years. The variety of the work kept Mary "challenged and excited." She felt "enriched by the people as they shared life and struggled to be faithful to the Gospel."

On her return to Baltimore, Mary cared for Kitty in her final illness and offered community service at Villa Assumpta.

Mary Burke was a daughter of Boston who loved everything "Boston." She was proud of Boston, proud of the Irish and proud of being Catholic. Mary inherited a great love of history and politics from her dad, and her reading reflected that love. Mary enjoyed life and had a quiet sense of humor. Her big blue eyes radiated a warm composure and her personal relationship with God.

SSND Associate Peggy Russell was a student in Mary's first grade class at St. Michael's School, Frostburg. Remembering Mary, Peggy said, "When I think of a saint, I think of Mary."

At Mary's request, the Memorial Mass was celebrated on Sept. 12 in the chapel of Villa Assumpta. Rev. Charles Borges, S.J. was the celebrant. Mary's cremains were buried on Sept. 17 within the gravesite of Sister Catherine Concannon at Villa Maria Cemetery, Glen Arm Rd., Glen Arm, Md. Sister Mary Elizabeth is survived by nieces and nephews.

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