

# JOYFUL TEACHER, GRACIOUS FRIEND

## Sister Michelle Gallagher

*August 6, 1930 - February 9, 2021*

by JOAN LICKTEIG, PBVM

Sister Mary Michelle Gallagher, daughter of Theresa McNertney and William Gallagher was born, second youngest child, on August 6, 1930, in Vail, Iowa, and baptized Theresa Darlene. Her family totaled five boys: Arnold, Lloyd, Merle, Leo and Gerald, and four girls: Rita, Nelda, Theresa and Jean; all of the family preceded Sister Michelle in death.

Receiving her Bachelor of Arts from Clarke College, Sister Michelle taught children in primary grades from Algona, Dubuque, Epworth, Mason City, Storm Lake, Waukon and Whittemore, all in Iowa, and St. Paul, Minnesota.

The Scripture verses Sister Michelle chose for her funeral liturgy teem with welcome, faith and love, reflecting her life. In the Letter to the Romans (*Romans 12:9-13*) our Christian duties are identified: Love one another, show respect, be fervent in spirit, rejoice in hope, be patient, persevere in prayer and be generous in offering hospitality. Sister Michelle embodied these gifts throughout her life.

As a first-grade teacher, from day one, Sister Michelle's kind, gentle and humble manner was embraced ... beloved by students and parents alike. Hosting a flawless Irish complexion and rosy cheeks, she could have modeled for the then-popular sister dolls. With the poise of a dancer, in her floor-length habit, she created the sensation of gliding wherever she went. Like Peggy O'Neill, of Irish song fame, Sister Michelle had eyes as blue as skies and she smiled all the while. No wonder students felt cared for and comfortable in her classroom. She was often remembered and appreciated as "their favorite teacher" long after the first grade.

Always happy, Sister Michelle enjoyed the good things life had to offer: tapioca pudding, chocolate, Scrabble and after-dinner naps. In high school she played basketball and was chosen as Homecoming Queen. In community she shared her gift of leadership by frequently serving as house superior or local director where she was appreciated for her listening and her kindness.

### God was in her eyes.

Sister Michelle loved people, especially family, friends and her students. When she went on home visits, it was as if she were magnetic; everyone gathered around. Nieces and nephews looked forward to these times of fun as she played along with

them, whether it was blowing bubbles or spraying with water guns! Sister Michelle's niece, Sister Michaeline Healy, also a Presentation Sister, is currently ministering as a pastoral associate at St. Mary Parish in Caledonia, Minnesota.

Retiring from teaching, Sister Michelle volunteered at American Martyrs Retreat Center in Cedar Falls, Iowa, where she assisted her friend, Sister Mary Jeanine Kuhn, retreat house director, by welcoming and registering guests and managing the gift shop, as well as doing a variety of housekeeping duties. In addition, she shared evening liturgy with the students from the University of Northern Iowa and offered spiritual companionship and mentoring to students from the university. Sister Michelle was a gifted listener and made people feel comfortable; it was the twinkle in her eye, the way she tilted her head and offered her warm smile. Faith and compassion grounded her.

### God was in her heart.

Sister Michelle enjoyed life! She loved life! She celebrated life ... delighting in her Irish heritage, St. Patrick's Day, her vocation, the beauty of nature, storytelling, word searches, praying, dancing, singing (an octave below the choir), whistling and welcoming. We were gifted to share life with Sister Michelle whose Facebook friends characterized her as ladylike, joyful, loving, quiet, contemplative, gracious, gentle, bright-eyed, fun-loving, easy-going, prayerful. "She sparkled."

**She is in God's heart, and remains in ours!**

