



Sister Anne Richard Baker, OP 1928 – 2015

Baptized Genevieve Baker, Sister Anne Richard was born in Chicago on December 31, 1928. Gen, as she was called by some family and friends, was the youngest of the ten children born to Bentley and Margaret (Danek) Baker. Her father worked for Ahlberg Bearing Company and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. The family lived in St. Carthage Parish and Anne attended the parish school.

Knowing that she was planning to enter the Congregation, her parents were surprised when, after graduating from eighth grade, she requested to attend Mercy High School. In her autobiography, Sister Anne wrote, "I discovered I had a vocation while in grade school and my father was willing to make the sacrifice [to send me to Mercy], but he wondered why not Aquinas?"

Sister Anne graduated from Mercy High School in June 1946 and entered the postulate in Adrian on June 23, 1946. In her mind, she had already calculated that by entering so soon after graduation she would be taking her final vows on her birthday.

The joy of this period was soon over-shadowed by the death of her mother in 1946 and two years later the death of her father in 1948. Both parents were still in their 40s.

After first profession on December 31, 1947, Sister Anne was assigned to teach at St. Brigid School in Detroit the following month. In her autobiography, she recalled her first four teaching assignments (January 1948-June 1961) and described her early years of teaching.

My first four mission assignments included St. Brigid in Detroit; Our Lady of Victory in Northville, Michigan; Our Lady of Sorrows High School in Farmington, Michigan; St. Augustine High School in Grafton, West Virginia. In the beginning I was teaching a second and third combination [classroom] and the [students] were not paying a bit of attention to me. It was not a discipline problem, the [second graders] just wanted to learn all the words I was teaching the third graders.

The supervisors saw what was happening and I was transferred to the middle school. They were having trouble in the middle grades and [eventually] I was transferred to [teach] on the high school level.

Summers during this thirteen-year period were spent studying at Siena Heights College where Sister Anne received her Bachelor of Science Degree in 1954. Her graduate studies were at the University of Detroit, where she received her Master of Science Degree in 1960. In 1961, Sister Anne was assigned to Cardinal Newman High School in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Originally Cardinal Newman High School was a branch of the parish high school known as St. Ann in West Palm Beach. When Sister Anne arrived in 1961, it was the central high school, designed to serve all of Palm Beach County. The Adrian Dominicans and lay men and women who taught at St. Ann, which was now closed, became the core faculty at Cardinal Newman.

Sister Anne taught math for twenty-eight years before moving to the Development Office as Assistant Director. Fourteen years later, she became Director of Alumni for the next six years.

In 2011, the Cardinal Newman High School community celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. During the school's celebration, Father David Carr, President of Cardinal Newman, announced Anne's decision to retire that year. John Clarke, the school principal, said that he was fortunate to have worked with Sister Anne Richard and several of the founding faculty. He said,

Sister Anne Richard thought it was a good time to leave as the school celebrates 50 years. Sister taught more than 6,000 students, participated in the school's first graduation of 40 students, and helped carry out the school spirit of the Dominicans and St. Dominic throughout the years.

From them I learned of the rich history and commitment of the Adrian Dominican Sisters who founded the school. Their charism remains deep today in all that we do at Cardinal Newman.

During her fifty years in West Palm Beach, Sister Anne took an active part in several professional and diocesan organizations. She served as President of the Palm Beach County Math Council and was President of the Palm Beach Serra Club for two years. She also served on the Provincial Council for Diocesan Sisters three times. In her autobiography, Sister Anne recalled her work on the Sisters Council.

When I served on the Provincial Council for Diocesan Sisters Council, I did a lot of vocation work. I would ask the pastors if I could have a display in front of church. I wasn't working for Commission at the time but they thought I should be a member so we all could work together.

I remember that when the sisters were trying to establish the Diocesan Council at a meeting, I volunteered my Mission Group to work out the plan for the first jubilee celebration for the new diocese of Palm Beach. We arranged it be held at Rosarian Academy around the pool. The bishop spoke at the celebration and since we did not have a Vicarress yet, the program became a business meeting until the rains came and we had to disperse.

Sister Anne returned to Adrian on December 6, 2011. She lived at the Dominican Life Center/Maria until she died on September 24, 2015, at the age of eighty-six and in the sixty-eighth year of her religious profession.

During the Wake/Remembrance Service, Sister Helen Sohn, Assistant to the Chapter Prioress of Holy Rosary Chapter, said:

When one reads Anne Richard's autobiography, it soon becomes apparent that she was a mathematician! It's just the facts, folks! There are wonderful factual accounts of her ministry as an elementary, middle school and high school teacher. She particularly speaks of her wonderful experience teaching mechanical drawing to students who struggled to learn and, for the first time, found success learning something they found both interesting and fun.

To speak of Anne's ministry and not mention Cardinal Newman High School in West Palm Beach would be to leave out fifty years of her history. Anne's impact on the West Palm Beach area is legendary – and her memory lives on as the Alumni Building was named in her honor.

Father David W. Carr, President of Cardinal Newman High School, sent this message:

This week Cardinal Newman lost one of its founding Sisters. Sister Anne Richard was a religious woman in the truest sense: a spiritual presence, a woman of pure dedication and commitment. Sister led by example, she had a true love of Catholic Education and a constant presence in the family life of the school. Throughout her 50 years of selfless service, she was a thread that wove God's love into so many families. Sister's mission was always love and service and continued to evolve as she ministered for 5 decades.

Mary Martens also wrote:

I met Sister Anne when I began my career at Cardinal Newman in 2004. She gave me strength to handle whatever came my way. I cannot express how much this very Special Woman touched my life. Sister will always remain in a very special place in my heart.

Her nieces shared many memories of their Aunt Gen. She was a pen pal and a spiritual guide. She was always giving them small gifts or mementos. They treasure her enduring love and support for them in many stages of their lives. No matter the situation, they knew they could rely on her love and support.

In her homily, Sister Ann Fallon referred to the readings¹ as she reflected on Anne's life and ministry. Here are excerpts of her words,

¹ Jeremiah 29:11-14; 1John 3:1-2; John 11: 21-27

Anne held fast in her heart to the words of Jeremiah, "For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare...plans to give you a future full of hope. When you go to pray to me, I will listen to you." And, indeed, Anne prayed and listened and her life changed.

Anne accepted that call and that plan on a Sunday afternoon, June 23, 1946, along with ninety-some other young women who arrived full of energy and the desire to make a difference.

Suffering came early to Anne with the loss of both parents within two years of her formative years in Adrian. She must have used the words from the first letter of John, "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God." It is more than likely that this difficult period in her life gave Anne the grace to be a source of joy and peace in the lives of countless young people who were touched by her years of ministry as an educator.

Just four years ago illness brought Anne back to this home where her life as a Dominican had begun. We watched her preaching continue and we witnessed the serenity of her person and her peaceful acceptance of so many moments when death seemed imminent and yet the spark of life remained. The words from John's gospel she chose for this liturgy must have brought great comfort to her and, especially, when she reflected on one particular line that prefaced those proclaimed today:

"When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him."



*Left: Confirmation.
Right: Baby Genevieve (future Sister Anne Richard) with brother and sister Bentley and Margaret during a Christmas visit with their Grandma Danek.*



Left: The Baker family – back row, from left: Genevieve (future Sister Anne Richard), Dorothy, Bentley, Margaret, and Dolores; front row, from left: Joseph, Richard, Edward, Kathryn and Judy.



Left: Sisters Anne Richard Baker, left, and Audrey Hall, right, with their friend Jane. They taught together at Cardinal Newman High School. Right: Sister Anne Richard at her Silver Jubilee celebration.