

Religious Sister of Mercy had ‘a heart of gold’

By Catholic Review Staff

A memorial Mass for Sister of Mercy Mary Magdala Thompson was held July 21 in Mobile, Ala. Sister Magdala died July 14. She was 89.

Sister Magdala was a teacher, college administrator and psychotherapist. Born as Ann Pattison Thompson in Baltimore, Sister Magdala grew up in Gwynn Oak. She attended All Saints Elementary School, and Mount St. Agnes High School and Junior College in Mount Washington. She earned a bachelor's degree in 1945 from St. Mary-of-the-Woods College in Terra Haute, Ind., before joining the Sisters of Mercy in 1947. She taught at Convent of Mercy High School in Mobile from 1950 to 1953, before professing perpetual vows in 1953.

In 1953, Sister Magdala returned to Mount St. Agnes to serve as the college registrar, and was named the school's academic dean in 1958, a position she held until 1966. She earned a master's degree in counseling from Loyola College, now Loyola University Maryland, in 1959.

In 1971, Sister Magdala earned a doctorate degree from Michigan State University and went on to co-author several studies of higher education. In 1974, she returned to Baltimore to serve as the dean of the graduate school of Loyola College, where she founded the school's pastoral counseling program.

In 1979, she enrolled in Auburn University in Auburn, Ala., to become a psychotherapist, earning certification in 1982.

Sister Magdala collaborated with other professionals to conduct spiritual growth workshops based on the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory theory of personality development. In 1983, she co-authored the book "From Image to Likeness: A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey."

She returned to Mobile in 1985 and held a private therapy practice until just before her death.

Sister Magdala was involved in social justice work throughout her life in Mobile and El Salvador, and helped to found the organization The Quest for Social Justice, as well a lecture series at Spring Hill College in Mobile for ongoing education for religious sisters and others in ministry.

Sister of Mercy Augusta Reilly, former executive director of Marian House in Northeast Baltimore, was one of Sister Magdala's students in Mobile, and later, a travel partner who accompanied her on trips to Ireland, Mexico and India.

"She was a real adventurer," Sister Augusta said of Sister Magdala. "What tied (her work) all together is that she had a heart of gold and a merciful heart."

A second memorial Mass will be held at 2 p.m. Aug. 25 at Stella Maris in Timonium. No burial is scheduled, as Sister Magdala donated her body to science.

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