

SISTER RACHEL PHILLIPE

OF OUR LADY OF DOLORS

RACINE



*BORN TO EARTHLY LIFE:
JULY 29, 1930*

*BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE:
AUGUST 26, 2021*

Sister Rachel Philippe Racine
Province of U.S.A. & Canada
1930 - 2021

Diane Racine was born to Philippe Henri Racine and Rachel Talbot in Fall River, MA. As one of a large French-Canadian family and coming as she did in the middle of her many siblings, Diane lacked neither companionship nor good times. She was both mother's helper with the younger ones and little sister to the older ones. The escapades of her brothers had her both laughing at their daring and praying for their daredevil tricks. She saw her brothers off to serve their country and prayed for their safe return. She looked forward to dances and outings with her big and little sisters, and she could jitterbug and do a neat Lindy.

Growing up, Diane had a quiet, contemplative side. Along with her love of music and art, she had a love for nature, especially butterflies, birds, and flowers. She was the first to notice the robin making her nest and hear the tiny phoebe's call-in early spring. She made sure her feathered friends were cared for. The time she spent at the Rhode Island School of Design helped to deepen this love.

Gradually the thought of religious life began to speak to her. Diane entered the Cluny Novitiate in Newport, RI on May 6, 1956, and took the name Sister Rachel Philippe of Our Lady of Dolors when she received the habit on December 8. Sister Rachel made her first vows on July 15, 1958, and left to join the Cluny community teaching at St. Catherine Laboure School in Torrance, CA. Life in Los Angeles was quite a change from the peacefulness of Newport. Classes were very large, the weather was warmer, and the students spend more time outdoors. But children are still children. And Sister Rachel knew how to speak to their hearts. Her niche was with the little ones. She knew

how to dry their tears on their first day of school and introduce them to the exciting adventures of learning. Her artistic talents, her love of music, and her delight in nature were all gifts that blossomed and helped her grow into a gifted and loving mentor to the young. She passed on to them her love of nature, taught them about a loving God, and grounded them in the essentials of the academic curricula.

After eleven years, Sister Rachel moved back across the country to Cluny School in Newport, RI where she not only excelled in teaching Grades One through Four, but also taught French and art in different classes. She loved the bucolic setting on Brenton Road and availed of the surroundings to pass on her love of nature to her students.

Sister Rachel visited the Mother House of the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny twice: once in 1964 when she also made a pilgrimage to Lourdes, and again in 1974 when she also visited the birthplace of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey, Founder of the Cluny Sisters.

In 1990, Sister Rachel traveled back to California, this time to teach at Sts. Peter and Paul School in Wilmington. Again, this was a whole new world for now she worked with Hispanic children growing up in the harbor of Los Angeles. She endeared herself both to the children, parents and the staff and faculty of Sts. Peter and Paul. Her calm presence and gentle smile always invited a sense of trust. Whether it was participating in the annual Fiesta, the jog-a-thon and the “dress up for Halloween”, Sister Rachel brought smiles and encouragement, as her quiet creative energy inspired everyone to “get involved”

After eleven years, she returned to Newport again, this time serving the little ones at Cluny School as a gifted tutor, while also assisting the teachers with enthusiasm amid the endless preparation of lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic.

In 2006 Sister Rachel became a reading resource teacher at the school. That was also the year she left the Brenton Road Community for the Javouhey House on Carroll Avenue. While it was not a large geographic move, it did take her away from the fields and walks she so enjoyed in the rural space of Brenton Road.

In 2011 Sister cut back on her hours, volunteering at the school as a reading resource teacher. It was only in her late 80s that Sister Rachel fully retired from teaching. Living at Javouhey House still provided many opportunities to enjoy the music of chattering birds she faithfully fed outside the chapel, or to count the new monarch butterflies alighting on her butterfly bushes she carefully tended.

Sister Rachel always kept in touch with her large family and enjoyed visiting with them in their homes whenever possible. She also welcomed them for a visit and it was at these times that her two families met—one of siblings, nieces, nephews and the other of the Cluny community—at whatever convent she lived. In community, she was a sister to her sisters in any way that they need assistance. She was a presence that was attentive and discreet in how she helped others.

Sister Rachel was a living example of the spirit of prayer. Throughout her life, she found the God of Beauty, Tenderness, Hope, in the art work she produced and in the ways in which she prayed with and in nature. In times of sorrow both in her own life and in the life of others, she turned and encouraged others to turn to Jesus, who was her source of strength and light.

In her retirement, Sister enjoyed her daily walk around the block “praying my rosary for my neighbors,” she said. She would often be

seen praying in the chapel, eyes closed, a peaceful expression on her face. Statues and monuments to poets and professors abound, and we honor them, but they cannot replace the loving hands and heart of the primary teacher whose words and actions speak of us of God.

In July of 2021, Sister Rachel suffered a stroke that necessitated a hospital stay and then onto a rehabilitation center. In the very short time that she was in the Nursing Facility, her prayerful acceptance of her weakness, her faith in the fearful loss of control in her body, inspired and touched other residents, nurses and therapists. Through the end of July and into August, she became weaker and found it more and more difficult to communicate with others. On July 26th her 91 year old body that had served her Lord so faithfully, heard the eternal call, “Come good and faithful servant enter into your Spouse’s Kingdom”.

She is missed by her Cluny Sisters and so many who came to offer their prayer and sympathy the days after her death.