Sister Diane Erbacher, OP
1930-2017

Sister Diane Erbacher, known also as Sister Mary Carlanne, was born in San Jose, California, on January 29, 1930. She was the oldest of three children born to Charles and Anne (Foltz) Erbacher. Her two younger brothers were Bill and Jimmy, who was born with a genetic chromosome disorder known as Down Syndrome. Her father was born in Covington, Kentucky, and her mother in Spencer, Nebraska.

The family moved several times and, as a result, Sister Diane was educated in several schools: St. Francis School in Baker, Oregon, and St. Mary School in Bedford, Oregon.

When Sister Diane was in the seventh grade at St. Mary, her family moved to Santa Cruz, California, and she finished her elementary and secondary education in Santa Cruz at Holy Cross School. This was her first contact with the Adrian Dominican Sisters, who staffed the grade school and the high school.

During her high school years, Sister Diane also worked at Sisters’ Hospital, located on West Cliff Drive. According Sister Christine Ostrowski, Sister Diane spoke fondly of her days working at the hospital and getting to know the Sisters.

Sister Diane had an aunt who was a Holy Name Sister, a cousin who was a Franciscan and another cousin who was a School Sister of Notre Dame. But when she decided to become a religious, she finally chose the Adrian Dominicans.

After graduating from high school in 1948, Sister Diane studied for one year at Marylhurst College in Marylhurst, Oregon, before entering the postulate in Adrian on September 8, 1949, at the age of nineteen. At that age, Sister Diane had already completed six years of piano and organ lessons and one year in college, so it was no surprise that during her postulancy she was assigned to teach at Resurrection School in Lansing.

One year later, on August 8, 1950, she received the habit and her religious name, Sister Mary Carlanne. Her canonical year ended on August 9, 1951, when she took her first vows.

Following first profession, Sister Diane was assigned to Ascension in Harvey, Illinois, where she taught fifth and sixth grades. She also taught music. After two years, Sister Diane was assigned to St. Ann School in Tucumcari, New Mexico. She taught and served as musician there for only one year and in August 1954 was assigned to St. Louis Bertrand School in Oakland, California. She continued to teach fifth and sixth grades and serve as musician there for the next eight years.

During her years in Oakland, Sister Diane received her bachelor’s degree in music from Siena Heights College in Adrian.

From 1962 to 1965, Sister Diane served in the Southwest. During the first year she taught middle grades, along with music, at St. Anthony in Casa Grande, Arizona. Then she was assigned to Sacred Heart School in Tucson, Arizona, for the next two years.

Sister Diane received her master’s degree from the University of Southern California in 1964 and a year later her brother Bill died at the age of twenty-five.
In 1965, Sister Diane was assigned to St. Brendan School in San Francisco, where she continued to serve as principal until 2005. The Spring 2005 issue of the parish newsletter, Voyager, contained this article.

After a remarkable span of forty years as principal for Sister Diane Erbacher, OP, and thirty-six years as teacher for Sister Christine Ostrowski, OP, the two Dominican Sisters will bid farewell to St. Brendan School at the end of this school year. Their departure also marks the end of the association between the school and the Dominicans Sisters of Adrian, Michigan, who have staffed the school since it was founded in 1947.

In January 2017, Sister Diane returned to Adrian, where she died on January 31, 2017, at the age of eighty-eight.

During the wake service, Sister Christine Ostrowski shared these stories.

In August of 1965, Diane was assigned to be principal of St. Brendan School where she spent forty years creating a positive, joyful, and inviting school. She was truly a gift to everybody who was a part of St. Brendan School. She was a strong woman and a strong leader. We remember most of all the gift that she was to all of us -- parents, faculty, and students. She wanted to be sure she created memories for the parents and students. And when they saw her they always remembered some special memory about St. Brendan.

In 1975, the pastor invited us to welcome a Vietnamese mother and her eight children. As always, Diane worked tirelessly to make sure they felt welcomed. We had one week to put things in order because the family would be living with us in the convent. Diane even called the Vietnam Embassy to find out how to pronounce each one of their names and we practiced.

The family learned from us, but we also learned from them. The family is present with us this evening to show their love for her.

Quoc Do spoke for the members of his family and shared this remembrance.

My name is Quoc and I'm the youngest of the Do family. Sister Diane would often refer to me as the baby of the family. It didn't matter that I was 41 years old with three kids. When she introduced me to anyone, I was the baby. Well, tonight my family asked me to speak for them and share some memories. Everyone that Sister Diane touched has their own personal memories but this evening, I get to share some of mine with you.

Sister Diane was a mother to me in every sense of the word. She helped raise me. She insisted on good manners and showed me how to dine properly at a formal dinner. She expected me to be courteous to others, to open and hold doors for others and address others properly. She even drove me to my doctor appointments. During those rides to the doctor she knew I was nervous so she would tap her thigh to the beat of the song playing on the radio. Somehow that comforted me. I remember her waking me up in the middle of the night to give me my next dose of meds, and to take my temperature when I was sick. She listened to my problems and offered advice – even about girls. Sister Diane lived her life with so much humility and expected the same from me. It was more important to be a good person over everything else.

Sister Diane helped make me into the person I am today. I was blessed to have her in my life. I will remember all the lessons she has taught me. I will miss my mom dearly and will cherish the many
memories we shared together.

Sister Diane’s spirit and her love were undeniable. She touched so many lives, from the many students and faculty at St. Brendan’s to the people with whom she had brief encounters. She touched them all. Her touch was most profound on my family because we were family!!!! The ways she touched our lives will remain, and I will keep those memories alive by sharing them with everyone.

Sister Carol Johannes, OP, delivered the homily and reflected on Sister Diane’s life and ministry through the readings. ¹ Here are excerpts from her message.

One thing that has been our companion quite relentlessly over the past few years is death. And death means loss, and we needn’t be told that loss is painful. But death also means rest, and as Adrian Dominicans, we’re not so good at resting. In many ways, we’ve always been God’s workhorses, and so we look forward to resting. And this week our Sister Diane joined many of our other friends in her place of rest, and we’re very happy for her.

Because an infinitely good and loving God constitutes heaven, we know it can’t be improved or enhanced. But if it could be, Diane would enhance it, with her graciousness, her friendliness, her ready smile, her generosity, her sensitivity to others. She was so bright and so gifted.

Diane spent decades and decades teaching and in administration, forty years at St. Brendan’s in San Francisco alone, making a better future for young people. And she was not only respected, but loved and revered by her colleagues, by parents, by students and by the sisters with whom she shared community. Any house was a happy house with Diane at the helm. And later, Diane’s ministry to the Do family transformed their lives, and we’re so happy that they are here with us today expressing their deep gratitude and affection for her.

It is no secret that Diane found the Chapter of Renewal and its ensuing years difficult. I suspect that there isn’t anyone of us that cannot think of a time when we, too, were hurt or angry or unhappy about something in the Congregation. But what I think is important is not that something troubled us. After all, every one of us in the Congregation is very human. What matters is whether or not we were able to work these things through and come to a place of healing. And the fact that Diane came home for Jubilee, and even more significantly, returned home and entrusted herself to our care and love when she was gravely ill, with a wish to be buried among us in our circles, certainly suggests that she was taking this step. And again, we’re very happy for her!

Jesus, the Way and the Truth and the Life, is everything. He breaks through now and again in our lives and one day he will return and take us home, as he promised. This week it was Diane’s turn and she’s now enjoying her place in the Father’s mansion. And we are very, very happy for her!

¹ Romans 6:3-4, 8-9; John 14: 1-6
LEFT: Members of the 2010 Diamond Jubilee crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Carol Johannes, Rina Cappellazzo, Joseph Eugene Fogarty, Barbara Hubbard, Mary Mackert, and Mary Louise Gass; middle row, from left, Sisters Joan Marconi, Diane Erbacher, Paul James Villemure, Charlotte Francis Moser, Mary Anthony Marelli, and Kathleen Sutherland; and front row, from left, Sisters Theodora McKennan, Mary Jo Sieg, Florence Marie Viaches, Michael Claire Wilson, Barbara Ann Mason, and Donna Markham (Prioress).

LEFT: Sisters at St. Louis Bertrand Convent, Oakland, California. RIGHT: From left, Sisters Elizabeth Clare Schindler, Diane Erbacher, and Madonna Black
LEFT: Sisters Diane Erbacher (left) and Christine Ostrowski with the Do family, sponsored by their parish. RIGHT: Sisters Christine Ostrowski (left) and Diane Erbacher