Sister Dorothy Jehle, OP
1921-2017

Dorothy Mary Jehle, known also as Sister Norbert Mary, was born on April 7, 1921, in Chicago. She was the oldest of six children born to Herman and Dorothy (Elvin) Jehle. Her five younger siblings, in the order of their birth, were Philip, Francis, Barbara, Kathleen and Eleanor.

Both of her parents were born in Kansas. Her father was a manufacturing jeweler whose work caused the family to move a few times. This is reflected in the various schools Sister Dorothy attended.

Her elementary education began at St. Joseph and Holy Cross Schools in South Bend, Indiana. When the family moved to Joliet, Illinois, she finished grade school at St. Patrick, where she met the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Her high school years were at St. Francis Academy in Joliet.

After graduating in 1939, Sister Dorothy attended the College of St. Francis in Joliet, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in 1943. She then worked as a reporter at the local newspaper, Joliet Spectator, until she entered the postulate on February 2, 1945.

Sister Dorothy received her religious name, Sister Norbert Mary, the following August and then began her novitiate year. On August 13, 1946, she made first profession and was assigned to teach for four years at St. Ambrose Grade School in Detroit.

In 1950, Sister Dorothy began her seventeen years of teaching high school students at three parish and one congregation high schools. Her first four assignments were in the Detroit area. She taught for one year at St. Theresa High School and then was assigned to teach at Dominican High School for five years. In 1956 she began her five years at St. Paul High School. Finally, she was sent to Elgin, Illinois, to teach six years at St. Edward High School, where she also served as assistant principal and student advisor in speech and journalism programs. Her high school teaching years ended at St. Edward in 1967.

Many of her summers during this period were spent at John Carroll University in Cleveland, where she earned a master’s degree in English in 1953. When not studying in the summer, Sister Dorothy was assigned to do parish visiting in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois. Mother Gerald viewed parish visiting as an opportunity for Sisters to experience how many people survive on the margins of society.

In the summer of 1963, Sister Dorothy began doctoral studies at Loyola University in Chicago. She received an Arthur J. Schmitt Foundation Grant and was in residence at Loyola University from 1967 to 1968. While writing her dissertation on the use of Latin rhetoric in the poetry of Cynewulf, she helped support herself by teaching part-time in the Chicago public high schools.
In 1971, Sister Dorothy began her forty years of ministry at Barry College/University when she became a member of the English Department. In 1975, she chaired the English Department and began expanding its offerings to include Women’s Studies. The Department also promoted the use of literary criticism.

Sister Dorothy retired from teaching in 1991 and received a plaque for her twenty years of teaching at Barry. In her annals she wrote the following about her next service at the University.

[When I ] retired from teaching English at Barry University, I received apart-time contract to initiate the University archives and to serve as co-editor of the Self-Study document for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation visit in 1993.

Every day I realize how much the sisters – many of them dead now – did for us who are now at Barry, how they worked with the students. What a tremendous influence they had on others outside the College even in its very early days. I wish I had known more about some of these sisters when I met them or lived with them over the years.

In addition to setting up archival procedures, Sister Dorothy took on the responsibility of processing the more than fourteen thousand records of the Cuban youths who arrived alone in the United States over a period of almost two years.

In the 60s, Cuban parents, fearing indoctrination and that the new Cuban government would take away their parental authority, exercised their right to choose how their children would be educated and sent them to the United States. From December 1960 to October 1962, more than fourteen thousand Cuban youths arrived here.

Operation Pedro Pan, as it is known today, was the largest recorded exodus of unaccompanied minors in the Western Hemisphere. This exodus was unknown to the general public for over thirty years until Monsignor Bryan Walsh, considered the Father of the Exodus, acknowledged that an article had appeared in a 1988 issue of Reader's Digest.

By 1996, Barry University had accepted responsibility for maintaining these records and Sister Dorothy became the keeper of the Pedro Pan archives. These records made it possible for families to locate their children when they were able to come to the U.S. Not all families were reunited quickly, and some not at all. To learn more details about Barry’s role in this project, click here to see the video of Dorothy being interviewed about her role in preserving the Pedro Pan records.

Dorothy retired in 2011 and returned to Adrian where she died on April 18, 2017, at the age of 96.

During the wake service, Sister Maria Goretti Browne, Vicarress of the Adrian Dominican Vicariate, shared the following about Dorothy.

Since Sister Dorothy spent so many of the past 50 years in Florida, many of us did not know of the very important work she coordinated. Since she has been here for the past six years, her quiet presence has graced all who came in contact with her. She was an “easy patient,” if there is such a thing. She was cooperative and was able to tease the staff as well as respond to their
teasing. She is already missed on 1 Maria and, I am sure, missed by her loving family, who never forgot a birthday or any special day.

Dorothy, your gentle, quiet, peaceful presence has been so calming for all of us and we are grateful to you. Your talents have not been hidden, but used for the benefit of so many people, particularly the families of those 14,000. May you have the peace and tranquility in heaven that you have shared with us who remain here on earth.

_Eternal peace grant to Dorothy, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine on her. May she rest in peace. Amen._

Reflecting on the readings\(^1\) selected for the funeral liturgy, Sister Mary Katherine Nolan, OP, said,

_We are in the season of the resurrection, the central tenant of our faith. There is mystery in the resurrection stories. The disciples at first do not recognize the risen Christ until he says or does something familiar to them, something that they remember Jesus doing in the past. Mary recognizes Jesus in the garden when he speaks her name, Mary. There is something unique and special about the way a person who loves us speaks our name. This mystery of the presence of the Risen Lord in our midst is still with us today as we encounter others in whom Christ lives and acts. Have you not met the Lord present in others?_

_Dorothy was a woman of faith who committed her life to carrying on the mission of Christ in the context of today’s society. I listened in awe to the stories told about her as a scholar, an intellectual, a strict teacher loved by her students; how she kept records of the 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children refugees and meticulously documented these children and secured these documents in the archives at Barry._

_The mission of Christ lived on in Dorothy. It lives on, also, in us as we commit ourselves to participate with our risen Lord in furthering the Reign of God, the reign of peace, justice and truth in today’s world._

_In faith we trust that Dorothy now has experiential knowledge of what has been prepared for those who love God. Dorothy, pray for us who still strive to remain faithful to the mission of love to which we are called._

---

\(^1\) 1 Corinthians 2: 1-9; John 11: 17-27
At the May 5, 2001 Barry graduation, from left, Sisters Agnes Louise Stechschulte, Dorothy Jehle, and Mary Arnold Benedetto. RIGHT: Sister Dorothy at Barry University.
LEFT: From left, Sisters Helen Duggan, Arlene Seckel, and Dorothy Jehle

LEFT: Sister Dorothy and Mary Ellen Bruno examine new materials at St. Edward Central Catholic High School in Elgin, Illinois, 1965. RIGHT: Sister Dorothy in a 1945 photo by Frank Dolasin
LEFT: Judge Mattie Belle Davis, left, a stage guest, poses with Sisters Dorothy Jehle, OP (center), Professor of English, and Eileen F. Rice, OP, Professor of History, during Barry University’s Commencement Ceremony, May 10, 1993. RIGHT: Sister Dorothy (left) at a farewell party in her honor with other staff members of Barry University’s Archives, from left, Carmen Casale and Sisters Mary Arnold Benedetto and Kathleen Comiskey.

Members of the 1995 Golden Jubilee Class are: back row, from left, Sisters Christine Hoffman, Anne Gallagher, Mary Therese Golden, and Joan Murphy; middle row, from left, Sisters Joellen Reis, Dorothy Jehle, Madeleine Sophie McLeod, Margaret Mehigan, Lois Spear, and former Sister Patsy Hafey-Wells; and front row, from left: Sisters Constance Kelly, Therese Mary Foote, Catherine Henry Schmid, Kathryn Lumbrezer, former Sister Rita Dougherty, and Sister Nadine Foley.