

## **In Memory of Theresa Blaquiere, RSM**



The board and staff of Mercy Education Project remember Sister Theresa Blaquiere, R.S.M. who passed away October 5, 2012. Sister Theresa served on the Board of Mercy Education Project for the past nine years and served as the Chair of the Board for the past seven years. She was beloved by all and will be missed greatly.

Sister Theresa was a strong and vibrant leader who helped to grow Mercy Education Project in many ways. She had a deep concern for the women and girls served by the organization.

In addition to her board duties and her work in the area of spiritual direction and with Jesuit novices, she served for a period as a math tutor with the women. After her board term ended in September, she continued to volunteer weekly to assist Mercy Education Project in the area of fund development.

Below is an obituary from the Sisters of Mercy :

### **SISTER OF MERCY, EDUCATOR, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR**

Sister Theresa Blaquiere, RSM, died Friday, Oct. 5 after a brief illness. She was 76 years of age and had been a Sister of Mercy for 59 years.

She was born to Mary Dorille (Boudreau) and John O. Blaquiere on Nov. 1, 1935 in Temperance, Mich., the third of seven children. The family later moved to Berkley, Mich., where Theresa attended Our Lady of LaSalette School and later, Mercy High School in Detroit. She was attracted to the Sisters of Mercy and entered the Community on Sept. 7, 1953. After six years of personal and professional preparation, she made perpetual vows on Aug. 16, 1959.

Sister Theresa earned a bachelor of arts degree from Mercy College of Detroit and a master's degree in educational administration and curriculum development at Saint Xavier College in Chicago. She was also a graduate of the National Internship in Community Economic Development in Baltimore, Md.

Her basic and continuing education prepared her well as she moved from teaching in parochial schools, to pastoral ministry, to holding national and local leadership positions in the area of housing and community development, to providing spiritual counseling. She left her mark in each of those areas.

From 1958 to 1967, she taught at schools in Detroit, Cadillac and Bay City and then became an instructor at Mercy College of Detroit. Then it was back to school where she served as principal at Holy Cross School in Lansing for six years. From 1971-74, she served a three-year term on the leadership team of the Sisters of Mercy, and from 1974 to 1977, she directed her ministry to pastoral care at a parish in Portage.

It was in Benton Harbor, however, that she began to follow her creative spirit more fully. There she was co-founder and co-director of the Catholic Community Center where her major responsibilities included social service, social action and fund raising. She served there from 1977 to 1981.

Her next ministry took her to Washington, D.C., where, from 1981 to 1982, she was responsible for the coordination and completion of the Sisters of Mercy Shelter the Homeless Project, which dispersed grants to local housing/shelter groups. From this came the decision of the Sisters of Mercy to establish the McAuley Institute, a national housing development which provided technical assistance, same day bad credit loans and advocacy to non-profit housing developers for 20 years. In 1982, Sister Theresa became the first executive director of the new institute and was responsible for a \$3 million investment pool.

The desperate need for improved housing drew Sister Theresa back to Detroit in 1984. She was the co-founder and then executive director of Core City Neighborhoods (CCN). CCN's mission included the physical and economic revitalization of a 3.5 square mile area on Detroit's near west side. Under her leadership, CCN developed a proven track record of getting things done in the area of housing development. This organization also developed Core City Landscaping and was successful in securing multiple year contracts with the City of Detroit to cut vacant lots.

After 10 years in this position, Sister Theresa served for six months as a consultant to the Detroit Community Development Funds Collaborative under the leadership of the Kresge and Hudson-Weber Foundations. As a consultant and experienced professional in the field of community and housing development, Sister Theresa assisted in the design and strategic planning for a \$10.5 million fund to be used by non-profit community and housing development organizations.

In 1994, the Sisters of Mercy elected her to serve on the governing body of the Province of Detroit. This position included working with the sisters and the Province's many sponsored ministries in education, health care and social services.

A well-deserved sabbatical year in 1998 gave her an opportunity to study Hebrew and Christian Scripture and to discover a love and gift for painting. This newly found

talent brought forth creative expressions and, to her surprise, people loved her art work and even purchased it from her.

Sister Theresa's most recent full-time ministry was with the Jesuit Formation staff in Berkley. For the next 11 years, she was assistant to the Director of Novices and was an instructor in Religious Life classes, as well as placement director for the ministry experiences of the first- and second-year novices. When the Jesuit novitiate was transferred to St. Paul, Minn., she decided it was time to move to a less structured and stressful life. She was in demand as a spiritual director and also served on a number of governing boards. Among these was the Mercy Education Project Board where she served as chair for eight years. During this time she devoted much of her energy to fund- and friend-raising for the organization.

Sister Theresa is fondly remembered as one who faced life's challenges with courage, creativity and good humor.

"Theresa was a teacher in mind, spirit and body," said Sister Helen Marie Burns. "She and I enjoyed the beauty of the great outdoors and traveled to Kensington Park or Belle Isle to share thoughts and faith, laughter and tears in the presence of water, sun and forested earth. Her car was always prepared for a long trip - blankets, chairs, food, selected reading and music. Theresa was a poet at heart and, on occasion, in print. She often spoke in metaphors which compared life to nature. Theresa was also a realist whose analysis was honest, respectful and direct."

Father Bill Verbyke, SJ, said, "She basically brought herself - wisdom, experience, humor - to Loyola House. Her lived experience as a religious, her witness, involvement and interest in social concerns and the rights and needs of the poor in our society are necessary in our formation process."

Brenda L. Schneider noted, "Theresa was the epitome of the 'street warrior' who was undaunted in her fight for an enhanced life graced by human dignity. Detroit's Core City Neighborhood and the community overall were the recipients of her love and passion."

Sister Linda Werthman wrote, "She was a wonderful person. I have known Theresa since 1967 when she and I lived together at Holy Cross Convent in Lansing. I knew her as a very creative and energetic principal who was always game for a new way of imparting values and knowledge to the children."

Sister Theresa received many honors and awards, including an Honorary Ph.D. from the University of Detroit Mercy, the Spirit of Detroit Award, the Community

Builders Award, the Wayne County Winning Ways Award and the Cunningham National Award for Mercy Action.

She is survived by her brothers, Norman (Wilma) of Union Lake and Dan (Mary) of Powhatan, Va.; her sisters, Rita (Jim) Butkovitch and Cecile (Bill) Brown; many nieces and nephews; Sisters of Mercy and numerous friends.

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