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Sister Maura Therese Power, RSM

Sisters of Mercy of Auburn, California



Maura Therese Power was born on October 8, 1937, in Killarney, County Kerry, Ireland. She and her twin brother John Joseph were born to Denis Power and Philomena Freeley. Two days later, Maura and John were baptized at the Cathedral in Killarney. In addition to her twin brother, she has an older brother Gerard and a younger sister Noreen. The last born child was Catherine “Riona” who died at the age of seven, having lived with Down syndrome.

BEGINNING THE EDUCATION PROCESS

All the children of the Power family began their education at age four at the Mercy Convent School in Killarney. After each child received First Holy Communion, the boys went to the Presentation Brothers School and the girls continued with the Mercy Sisters.

FAMILY FORCED TO MOVE TO DUBLIN

Maura’s father Denis worked in Hilliard’s Department Store. When labor disputes arose in the mid-1940s, Denis lost his job at the store and was forced to go to Dublin to look for another position. He secured a new job in Dublin and the family moved to Dublin in 1949. Since this was right after the end of World War II, life was difficult for everyone in Europe as well as the Power family in Ireland.

After arriving in Dublin, the family settled in Clontarf along the coast in a new house that Maura’s father was able to purchase. She began secondary school with the Irish Sisters of Charity on King’s Inn Street. She did her secondary schooling there and completed her course in 1953 and passed the national exams.

HOW MAURA ENTERED THE SISTERS OF MERCY, AUBURN

Maura’s brother Gerard was an avid football fan and regularly attended the Gaelic football games in Croke Park. At one of the Sunday games, Gerard met a priest named Father Patrick Kennedy and invited the priest to come to the Power’s home for dinner. During the dinner, Father Kennedy asked Maura what she planned to do now that she had finished secondary school. Maura said she was thinking about become a religious sister, either with the Sisters of Mercy or the Sisters of Charity.

A few months later, Maura received a letter from the Sisters of Mercy of Auburn telling her that they heard she had expressed interest in becoming a nun. They invited her to contact the Sisters of Mercy in Ardfert, County Kerry. The Sisters in Ardfert made contact with Maura, inviting her to an interview in Mallow, County Cork. Maura took the train to Mallow and when she arrived at the station, she met Bridget Mary Flynn who was also interested in joining the Mercy Sisters. The Sisters with Bridget and Maura went to the Flynn home where Maura was interviewed and then had dinner with the Flynn family.

Maura returned to Dublin and a few months later she received a letter of acceptance to the Mercy community. She was invited to come to Abbylands where she met other young women who were interested in joining the Mercy Sisters. While Maura and the other candidates were waiting for their US visas, their stay at Abbylands gave the Mercy Sisters the opportunity to get

to know these young women. Of the ten who spent time at Abbylands, only five eventually came to Auburn.

MAURA BECOMES AN ASPIRANT IN ABBYLANDS

Maura's father was reluctant to let her leave Ireland and move so far away from home. Denis told Maura that the Mercy Sisters began at Baggott Street, Dublin so why did she not stay in Ireland? Maura had no clear answer except to say that she felt drawn to California even though she had no personal knowledge of what California was like.

Maura became an aspirant of the Sisters of Mercy of Auburn at Abbylands. Five aspirants left for America from the Shannon Airport on a propeller plane to Chicago and then on to San Francisco where they were met by a laywoman who picked up the five young women and drove them to Auburn where they arrived around 2 AM on May 10, 1954. Later that day, Maura and the other young arrivals were admitted as postulants of the Sisters of Mercy of Auburn and joined two other young women, one from Minneapolis and the other from Shreveport, Louisiana who entered a few week earlier.

LIFE IN AUBURN

During the next six months, the postulants attended classes on prayer as well as classes exploring what religious life was about. The postulants learned how to play basketball and baseball as part of their exercise program.



L-R, Sisters Maura Power, Kathleen Horgan, Margaret Herbert and Bridget Mary Flynn

At the end of the six months, these seven young women received the white veil and became novices on November 11, 1954. During the first year, the canonical year, the group studied theology and the deeper meaning of religious life and the vows. There were some good instructors like Fathers Charles O'Leary, Cornelius Higgins, Damian Craegn, CP, and Damian Lyons, OFM. They also had classes taught by Mercy Sisters Mary Evangelist Morgan, Mary Magdalene

Nagle, and Mary Clement Fagin who taught English and art. American history was taught by Mr. Boarooshin and American Literature by Sister Mary Evangelist Morgan. Sister Mary Cecilia Nealis taught elocution and speech. The course work the Mercy Sisters' College at the Motherhouse in Auburn was fully accredited by the Catholic University in Washington, DC.

FIRST PROFESSION OF VOWS

Sister Maura made her first profession of vows as a Sister of Mercy on November 20, 1956 in the Auburn Mercy Sisters' Chapel. Her profession of vows was for three years. During this time, the church began reviewing Canon Law and changed temporary vows from three to six years.

SISTER MAURA'S TEACHING CAREER BEGINS

In the fall of 1957, Sister Maura was assigned as a sixth grade teacher at Sacred Heart Parish School in Sacramento for two years. Her next assignment was to Saint Joseph Grammar School on 8th and G Streets in Sacramento. In 1961, she attended the University of San Francisco for one year and completed her bachelor degree in American History.



Photo by John E Boll

Saint Joseph School, Redding

In 1963, Sister Maura was assigned to Saint Joseph School in Redding where she taught the eighth grade for three years. In 1966 she returned to USF and after two years of study completed her master's degree in theology and Scripture in 1968. During these years, the sisters involved in

teaching attended summer school in a college or university. The sisters attended summer classes at Holy Names College, Oakland; Dominican College, San Rafael; Saint Mary's College, Moraga and the University of San Francisco.

TEACHER AT BISHOP MANOGUE HIGH SCHOOL

In 1968, Sister Maura began teaching religion and American History at Bishop Manogue High School in Sacramento. In 1971, she was transferred to Mercy High School in Carmichael and taught religion since that was the need at that time.



Photo by John E Boll

Bishop Manogue High School, 21st and Broadway, Sacramento

TEACHING AT MERCY HIGH SCHOOL, CARMICHAEL

This was now the post Vatican II era which initiated a lot of change in the church. A very popular musical hit the charts called *Jesus Christ Superstar* and Mary Magdalene's song became a favorite of all the girls at the school to the chagrin of the parents. At an open house gathering at the school there was an open session with the parents and they wanted to know if Sister Maura would tell their daughters not to sing that song anymore. Sister Maura asked the parents to tell her what upset them so much about the song. The parents responded that it made Jesus too human. A light dawned in Sister Maura's mind and she understood now why the parents were so upset. She told the parents that although Jesus was Son of God, he was also fully human and that somewhat seemed to ease the minds of the parents.

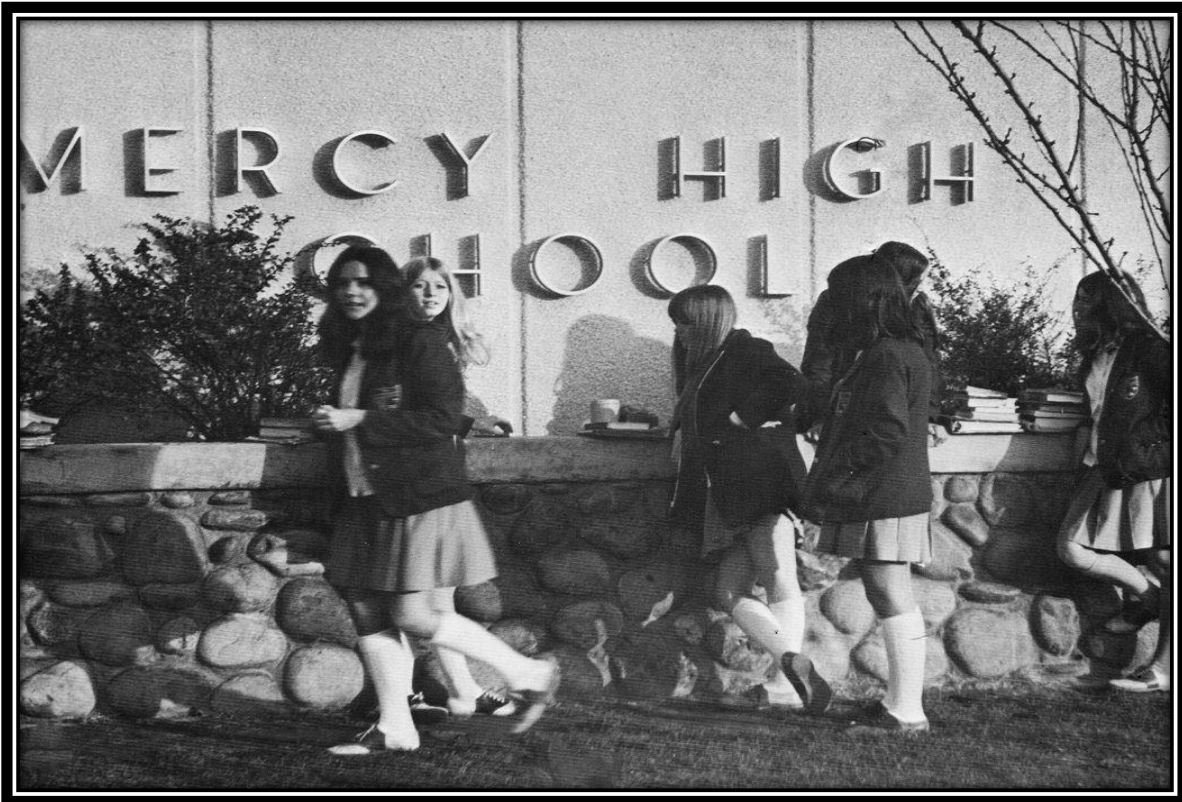


Photo from the web

Mercy High School, Carmichael

ELECTED TO A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE MERCY COMMUNITY

In 1974, Sister Maura was elected to the Auburn Mercy Sisters' General Council. She continued teaching at Mercy High, Carmichael part time for the year. In 1975, she moved to Auburn where she worked with Mercy vocations for a year. She was then appointed novice director in Auburn while continuing to serve on the Mercy Sisters' Council. She was on the leadership team until 1982 when she was elected Superior General of the Auburn Mercy Sisters for the next eight years until 1990.

BEGINNING OF MAJOR CHANGES FOR THE SISTERS OF MERCY

During these years of leadership, Sister Maura enjoyed being in a leadership role because she learned a great deal by dealing with challenges like becoming a co-sponsor of Mercy Housing with both the Omaha and Burlingame Sisters of Mercy. In addition to that, in 1984, the Auburn Sisters faced the challenge of reorganizing their hospitals and together with the Burlingame Mercy Sisters, created a new healthcare system called Catholic Healthcare West. At that time, the Auburn Sisters had five hospitals and the Burlingame Sisters had seven. A year later, the Adrian Dominican Sisters joined this new hospital system.

The greatest challenge in the late 60's through the 80's and 90's (and even still today) has been the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the Church as a whole, and in a particular way on religious life, especially for women Religious.

The 16 documents of Vatican II became a seismic shift in the church's understanding of herself, and for Religious Communities, the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life brought about a major change in a person's mindset. Religious Communities of Women put a good deal of time and energy into studying the implications of the document. The Mercy Sisters were encouraged to rediscover and renew the original Spirit of their Foundress, Catherine McAuley, her purpose in establishing the Congregation, and how this gift to the Church continues at this time.

Many very profound and lively meetings were held, and many diverse viewpoints emerged leading to major disagreements: how significant was (is) the religious habit which was worn by so many of the sisters for multiple decades and now was possibly changing? Many practices of daily silence were being modified and other structures of Religious Life long mandated by the 1917 Code of Canon Law were reviewed in conjunction with the founding charism of Mercy Sisters. This huge challenge was carried in the late 1960s by Sister Mary Teresita Durkin and Sister Kathleen Dunne, in the 1980s by Sister Maura Power and in the 1990s by Sister Susan McCarthy.

The essence of Religious Life, a life consecrated to God through the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Consecrated Chastity and Obedience and ordained for service in healthcare, education and social services was never changed but clarified and enhanced. The identity of an Apostolic Religious Woman in daily life was being expressed in new forms. During these decades some Sisters became clearer about their vocation and moved out of community life and into other vocations of marriage, lay ministry and single life. The work of Renewal is ongoing.

MERCY SISTERS ACROSS AMERICA



Photo courtesy of Sr Maura Power

Meeting of Representatives of the Twenty-Five Independent Mercy Sisters Groups

The Sisters of Mercy of Auburn were part of the McAuley Conference which was a friendly meeting of all the Sisters of Mercy in the United States. Through these annual meetings, the Mercy Sisters in the United States came to realize how much the different branches had in common. They had the same Foundress, the same rule of life and the same work - healthcare, schools and special care for poor women and children.

In the late 1980s, there were 25 independent Mercy groups plus the Mercy Union which had nine provinces at that time. The Mercy Sisters began to talk together about forming the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and that was finalized on July 1, 1991.

SISTER MAURA COMPLETES HER TERM OF OFFICE AS SUPERIOR GENERAL

Sister Maura completed her eight years as Superior General of the Auburn Mercy Sisters in 1990. She took a year sabbatical at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago where she did studies in Scripture and parish ministry. After returning to Sacramento, she was invited by Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Redding to serve as director of adult education in the parish. She served as director of the parish RCIA and adult religious education until 1996 at which time she accepted the position of Diocesan Director of Religious Education.

DIRECTOR OF DIOCESAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Sister Maura succeeded Father John Corapi as director of Diocesan Religious Education. This department oversaw a large group of comprehensive resources for the whole diocese including youth ministry, services for the deaf and hearing impaired, ministry to those with special needs, religious education for the Catholic Schools and parish religious education programs, sacramental preparation and RCIA.

Sister Maura was amazed by the large number of services provided by the diocese to the parishes. She worked in this ministry for only two and a half years when she was elected to a new Leadership Council of the Auburn Sisters of Mercy 1998. After six years, she returned to adult education and parish ministry in 2004 serving different parishes throughout the diocese. Returning to Redding, she rejoined Our Lady of Mercy Parish and became the director of Adult Education for the next six years.

SISTER MAURA RESIGNS DUE TO HEALTH

Sister Maura began having struggles with her physical balance and after examination by doctors, they discovered she was suffering from adult hydrocephalous. She moved to the Mercy Mother House in Auburn where she now lives. Even though she is somewhat limited by her medical condition, she continues to teach Scripture at Saint Teresa Parish in Auburn.

CELEBRATES SIXTY YEARS AS A MERCY SISTER

Sister Maura celebrated her 60th anniversary as a Sister of Mercy in 2016. She is deeply grateful for God's goodness to her throughout her life. One of her big regret is the inability of the Catholic Church to open the role of ordained priesthood to women.

IN GRATITUDE TO SISTER MAURA POWER

The Diocese of Sacramento has been blessed by the heroic courage and tireless ministry of the Sisters of Mercy with the arrival of Mother Mary Baptist Russell and six other Mercy Sisters in Sacramento on October 2, 1857. They began to minister to the many poor in Sacramento, established a school to teach the children and a hospital to care for the sick and dying.

Sister Maura was one of five young postulants who came from Ireland to begin a life of service to the Church of Sacramento. For sixty years, she has given her life in service to many ministries as a teacher in both Catholic grammar and high schools, a leader in her Mercy community and Superior General of the Auburn Sisters of Mercy, diocesan director of Religious Education and director of Faith Formation in various parishes in the diocese.

Sister Maura was Superior General of the Auburn Mercy Sisters when the decision was made to join with other religious communities operating Catholic hospitals to establish Catholic Health Care West. She was also involved in the creation of Mercy Housing and the opening of new Catholic hospitals in the Diocese of Sacramento.

She has been a leader in the diocese for many years just like Mother Mary Baptist Russell was in her day. Had Sister Maura been able to fulfill her wish to serve as a priest, she would have been an effective minister of the Gospel. Even so, she has exercised well her Christian baptismal character as priest, prophet and shepherd over these past six decades.

We have been blessed to have Sister Maura's presence and ministry in this diocese as well as all the dedicated Sisters of Mercy who have lived the charism of Mother McAuley to care for poor women and children, educate through schools and to care of the sick through hospitals. We wish Sister Maura continued blessings on the journey to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Sister Maura Power, RSM has given permission for her biography to be published by the Sacramento Diocesan Archives.



Photo by John E Boll

Statue of Mother Mary Baptist Russell, Mercy Convent Grounds, Auburn

PHOTOS OF SISTER MAURA'S LIFE AND FAMILY



Sister Maura and her mother Philomena Freeley Power



Sister Maura in 1966 on her first visit home in Ireland



Sister Maura with her mother Philomena, father Denis and sister Noreen in 1966



Sister Maura with her nieces



Sister Maura and her brother Gerard at Carlingford Lough, Ireland



Sister Maura and her brother Gerard at Portmarnock, Ireland



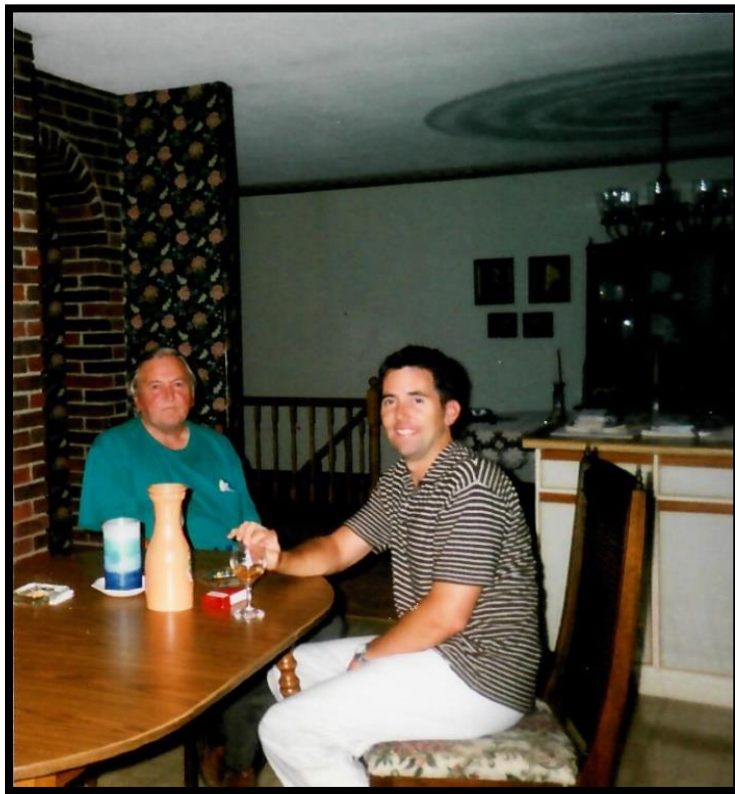
Sister Maura in Yorkshire, England



Gerard and wife Gabrielle in Connemara



L-R, Sister Maura's twin brother John, his son Michael and his wife Ellen, Toronto, Canada



Sister Maura's brother John and his son Michael



Sister Maura at Our Lady of Mercy Church, Redding



Sister Maura Power, RSM