SISTER MARIE PATRICK RYAN
1905-1985

The scripture vigil for Sister Marie Patrick Ryan began with the story of a young woman who had just come over from Ireland.

The narrator, Sister Mary Alice Collins, saw Catherine Ryan for the first time in the front pew of Holy Rosary Chapel, and heard her sobbing aloud. On her way into the chapel, Sister Mary Alice met Sister Gerald Barry coming out, who then told her, "Go to that postulant, and console her. Take her out anywhere to distract her. See if you can make her laugh a little. She is heartbroken for her parents and family in Ireland." Believing herself to be empowered to take the young lady out anywhere, Sister Mary Alice began to suggest possibilities. Catherine Ryan let her talk on, and then gave her that determined look for which she was to become well known, and replied, "Thank you. But I'll be leaving for Ireland entirely at noon."

The adverb "entirely" was to be heard frequently during the next few weeks, for Catherine was one of three postulants from Ireland, all of whom were inundated in tears, with the ache in the heart for home.

Born on March 10, 1905, Catherine thrived among 14 children brought into life by Marie McCarthy and Patrick Ryan on their farm in Ennistymon, County Clare, Ireland, not far from their own birthplaces. She was neither the oldest nor the youngest, more in the middle of her sisters and brothers. They were all baptized in St. Michael Parish Church, and attended the Furglan National School. In fact, Catherine had completed 12 years and had come to 19 years of age when, after a year of deliberation and the blessing of her parents, she joined Mary Ann Barry and Honora O'Leary on the voyage to America, where they were "to go into the convent" in Adrian, strangers to all except Sister Gerald Barry.

Lonesomeness took hold of them. In Ireland, their parents had been listening to their longing for home in their letters, and had almost reached the point of bringing them back. In Adrian, the three were packed to go home until one day, in a certain incident, Mother Augustine Walsh and Sister Gerald Barry, each with a different psychological approach, brought them to "their senses."

In a few months, Susan Ryan, a younger sister of Catherine, arrived in Adrian, "never to shed a tear in front of them."

They were received together on August 19, 1925, Catherine with the names of her parents, Marie Patrick, and Susan with Eileen Marie. (Mary Ann Barry became Kathleen Marie, and Honora O'Leary Catherine Patricia.)

During their canonical year, they welcomed two more colleens: Teresa Ryan, the sister of Sisters Marie Patrick and Eileen Marie, and Susan Barry, the sister of Sister Kathleen Marie. Thus, on August 4, 1927, the day "the first three professed their vows, the second two received their names, Sister Ann Noreen Ryan and Sister Marie Joseph Barry."

Sister Marie Patrick's first assignment lasted 12 years at St. Alphonsus, Dearborn, a duration which established her competency as a seventh and eighth grade teacher. She had further experience at St. Lawrence, Utica, and one year in Winslow, Arizona, in parish visiting before returning to Michigan and the seventh grade pupils at Visitation, Detroit. From there, she was appointed principal-superioress at St. Nicholas School in Chicago for a term of six years, after which she was sent to teach seventh grade pupils at St. Carthage School. In the course of her fourth year there, she was assigned to Our Lady of Loretto, a new school in Hometown, as principal-superioress.

When she completed her term, she taught eighth grade at St. Kilian School, Chicago, for six years, and then spent another seven years in the seventh grade classroom at Star of the Sea. Her 60 years of teaching and tutoring ended in her 12th year at St. Joseph School, Homewood.

She retired at Star of the Sea, where she had previously been a seventh grade teacher. As such, Sister Marie Patrick would not be forgotten. She was a hard teacher with a soft heart. It was a spacious heart, especially for children with learning disabilities, and those enduring difficult social or economic conditions.

She enjoyed "active retirement," and especially liked her daily walk around the neighborhood, a treat she could not always give herself when she was busy in school. It was on one of those walks that she was taken by the instant occurrence of a cerebral hemorrhage. After hospitalization in Chicago, she was brought, at her own request, to Maria Health Care Center. She died there on December 23, 1985, the anniversary of her mother's death, with Sisters Eileen Marie and Ann Noreen praying at her side, and her dear family across the sea keeping vigil in their hearts.

Several sisters, and other friends, risked the harsh weather to be present for the Mass of Resurrection concelebrated by the Rev. James McIlhone and the Rev. Richard Conyers, CSC, in Holy Rosary Chapel.

In the homily, Father McIlhone spoke of her as most people saw her: plain, steadfast, sensible, and not earth-shaking in her achievements. Her greatness was in loyalty to God, to family, friends, parish, school, Congregation and Church. She was fiercely loyal from the moment she decided to remain in Adrian until the end of her time.

