

Sisters of St. Francis

o f M a r y I m m a c u l a t e

Sister Grace Ann Rabideau was born on January 15, 1928, in Bayfield, Wisconsin, a member of the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa. She was named for her mother, Charlotte, and later took as her religious name the name of her sister Grace Ann. She had also been given an Ojibwe/Chippewa name, *Wabanokwe*, meaning “Early Star in the Morning Woman.”

Growing up was hard. Young children, along with their parents and grandparents, were picked up by farmers in their trucks at 5:00 a.m. and taken to farms to pick strawberries, raspberries, green beans and apples. She experienced ethnic prejudice: Indian vs. White and Catholic vs. Protestant. “We kids met on the bridge and called each other names,” she said. Charlotte attended Holy Family Grade School but didn’t like school. She had low self-esteem, doing well in English and spelling but not in math and never seeing herself as successful. In Bayfield High School, she was resented for being Catholic and Indian. This was during World War II and the young men were taken into the army. Girls from the high school were released early to take over men’s jobs of picking fish in freezing weather and later planting acres of beans for farmers.

When Charlotte went to Joliet, Illinois, after high school to join the Franciscans who had taught her in Bayfield, she shuddered at the thought of going to college. Little did this young girl know that someday she would hold a BA degree, two Masters degrees, and, in 2006, be listed in the Cambridge *Who’s Who* registry of executives and professionals as one of our country’s most accomplished women. After two years of college, the community sent her to

Alleluia!



Sister Grace Ann Rabideau, OSF

teach elementary grades. For the next five years, Sister Grace Ann spent summers finishing college classes and getting a BA degree in Philosophy. For thirteen years she taught in Ohio and Illinois schools before being assigned to her own Holy Family School in Bayfield where she eventually became the principal.

Mother Alfred Moes, founder of the Joliet Franciscans, had come to America from Europe hoping to minister among the Indians. Though that didn’t happen for her, the young girl from Bayfield took up that dream and embarked on an impressive journey across the country to help Native Americans from many tribes. While in Bayfield, Sister Grace Ann was offered a grant from the University of Minnesota that came with a commitment to teach Native Americans. Using this grant, she got an MA in Education Administration and in 1972 went to California State University in Northridge seeking to work with Indian students. She was hired as the American Indian Counselor and Advisor. Together with other professors, she formed an American Indian Studies Minor. She also worked with the financial aid office to make sure Bureau of Indian Affairs deadlines were kept. Indian students came to California

from many states. To help them with their loneliness, she organized social activities for them: picnics, volleyball, hay rides, and horseback riding.

The mayor of Los Angeles appointed Grace Ann to the American Indian Commission of L.A. She got her second masters degree, this time in counseling in the ed. psych. department. After nine years at Cal State Northridge, she went in 1981 to Labre Indian School in Ashland, Montana, to be a counselor on the Cheyenne Reservation which also served the neighboring Crow Reservation. From there, Grace Ann moved on to Denver to work briefly with an Indian program for drug and alcohol prevention. Then she returned to California to a counselor position at UCLA followed by the advisor for American Indian students position at Los Angeles Valley Community College.

In 1994, while Grace Ann and her two very good friends, Sisters Clare and Maxentia, were living in Northridge, California, a magnitude 6.7 earthquake struck this densely populated area in the San Fernando Valley. Thirty-three people were killed, over 7,000 injured and 20,000 area residents were left homeless. Sisters in Joliet and in several western states were trying desperately and without success to check on Grace Ann and her companions. They would later find out that the Northridge sisters were gambling in Las Vegas while the earthquake shook their home. Not only had gambling saved her from possible injury, but it also offered her a chance for teachable moments. When vacationing in Bayfield, Grace Ann often spent time with her very good friend and former Franciscan classmate, Jo Finnen. She taught Jo's children how to gamble, claiming she was teaching them how to do math. To this day, the boys keep the containers that hold their nickels.

From 1997 to 2007, Sister Grace Ann held the title of President of the Governing Board of the American Indian Scholarship Fund of Southern California. "Our Board volunteered endless hours to help raise money and reach students of all tribes," she said. "At fundraisers, we honored the students and their families for achieving educational goals and overcoming seemingly insurmountable hardships." When Grace Ann retired and returned to her Bayfield home in 2008, she could be found teaching, coordinating a domestic abuse program for women and living among and ministering to her Native American friends and family until she could do no more. A member of the Bad River Band and growing up near the Redcliff Reservation, Grace Ann had family and friends everywhere.

Sister Phyllis, who was serving in the area while Grace Ann was retired, said, "Grace knew everybody and everybody knew Grace. There was a real love affair between them all. She was very proud of being a Chippewa Indian."

On February 8, 2026, at age 98, during the year she was celebrating 80 years with her community, this joyful, fun-loving woman died peacefully in her sleep. She knew that through her ministry of service, she had lived her Franciscan life well. As the gates to a new adventure open wide, we send you on your way, Grace Ann. Take your great heart and your big smile and enjoy a reunion with the sisters, friends and family who have waited patiently to welcome you home. Early Star in the Morning Woman, let your light shine. Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Alleluia Letter written by
Sister Karen Berry, OSF**

Sister Grace Ann Rabideau, OSF

January 15, 1928—February 8, 2026

<i>Born:</i>	January 15, 1928
<i>Mother:</i>	Charlotte Cadotte Rabideau
<i>Postulancy:</i>	September 4, 1945
<i>Novitiate:</i>	August 12, 1946
<i>First Profession:</i>	August 12, 1948
<i>Final Profession:</i>	August 12, 1951
<i>Entered New Life:</i>	February 8, 2026

Ministry History

1948-1953	Teacher: Grades 1 and 2, Immaculate Conception, Columbus, Ohio
1953-1954	Teacher: Grade 1, Most Pure Heart of Mary, Shelby, Ohio
1954-1955	Teacher: Grade 1, St. Francis de Sales, Toledo, Ohio
1955-1960	Teacher: Grade 1, Most Pure Heart of Mary, Shelby, Ohio
1960-1961	Teacher: Grade 1, Corpus Christi, Columbus, Ohio
1961-1963	Teacher: Grade 2, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Chicago, Illinois
1963-1966	Teacher: Grades 5, 6, Holy Family, Bayfield, Wisconsin
1966-1970	Teacher/Superintendent-Principal: Grades 7, 8, Holy Family, Bayfield, Wisconsin
1970-1971	Student: University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota
1971-1972	Social Worker: Bayfield area, Wisconsin
1972-1976	Advisor to American Indian Students: California State University, Northridge, California
1976-1981	Counselor: California State University, Northridge, California
1981-1983	Counselor: Labre Indian School, Ashland, Montana
1984-1984	Counselor: Tribal Heritage Project, Denver, Colorado
1984-1988	Counselor: UCLA, Los Angeles, California
1989-1989	Minorities Counselor: Community College, Los Angeles, California
1989-2001	Academic Advisor: Los Angeles Valley College, Van Nuys, California
2001-2002	West Acres, Joliet, Illinois
2002-2004	Counselor: LA Valley College, Los Angeles, California
2004-2005	Teacher Orientation Classes and Instructional Aide: Los Angeles Valley College, Valley Glen, California, Rinaldi Adult Center, Granada Hills, California
2005-2007	Teacher Orientation: LA Valley College, Granada Hills, California
2007-2008	In Transition
2008-2010	Substitute Teacher Assistant: Bayfield Public School, Bad River, Odanah, Wisconsin
2010-2014	Coordinator/Teacher in a Domestic Abuse Program for Women: Bad River Reservation, Odanah, Wisconsin
2014-2024	Outreach Senior Care: Bayfield, Wisconsin
2024-2026	Ministry of Presence and Prayer: St. Patrick's Residence, Naperville, Illinois

<i>Interment:</i>	Calvary Cemetery, Bayfield, Wisconsin
<i>Predeceased by:</i>	Her mother, Charlotte Cadotte Rabideau, and her sister Grace Ann
<i>Survived by:</i>	A Special Cousin, David Curran, and a large, close-knit family of cousins, friends, and colleagues

Rest in Peace, Sister Grace Ann!