

## INTRODUCTION

*John Schifsky*

Sister Mary Charles McGough was 82 years old and in her 61st year of monastic profession when she passed away at St. Scholastica Monastery, Duluth, Minnesota, on September 2, 2007. A dedicated and engaging teacher and mentor, she devoted her life to education and art. At first a classroom teacher in elementary schools, she went on to teach art in high school and college until she moved to the Barn where, initially, she organized her popular summer programs for children. An artist as well as an educator, she made time to do her own work in a variety of media, including watercolor, sculpture, ceramics, paint, acrylic, and woodcuts.

Sister Mary Charles was an introspective, deeply spiritual woman. In her seventeen years of experience in classrooms she became convinced that every person has a creative spark which, when nurtured, will break into flame. She was equally convinced art had the power to inspire and heal people, to help them in their spiritual journeys. Finally, she believed creating and appreciating art was a communal activity, engaging both the creator and the public. Guided by these convictions, she produced a wide variety of works of art which grace homes, places of worship, and public spaces throughout the Northland as well as across the country. An artist, friend, activist, and dedicated religious, she has had a profound impact on the community in which she lived.

Sister Mary Charles was born in Cloquet, Minnesota. The oldest of four children, she was a second mother to her siblings. Her younger sister Pat recalls Sister Mary Charles as a spirited and active youngster, something of a tomboy, a high school athlete who was

popular with her peers and always doing art projects. She was called upon to do posters and decorate for the Duluth Cathedral High School prom. Pat thought it was brave of Sister Mary Charles to travel to Alabama in the summer between her junior and senior years to work with the poor.



*The McGough family, ca. 1940. L-R: Molly (Mary Helen), mother Ruth (Brownell), brother John, father Justin Hugh McGough; in front, sister Pat and brother Charles*