



Birth
October 2, 1932

Baptism
October 9, 1932

Profession
July 19, 1953

Death
July 31, 2015

Burial
Our Lady of Good
Counsel Cemetery
Mankato, Minnesota

*Precious and blessed is
the death of the faithful
before God... for
they die in union with
their dear Jesus, in the
grace of God, in peace.*

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger
Foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame
Letter 11, September 10, 1831

In Loving Memory

Sister Annabelle [William Marie] Theis, SSND

Sister Annabelle Theis, 82, died Friday, July 31, 2015, in Notre Dame Health Care, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. She suffered a severe stroke in February from which she never fully recovered. Her sister, Valeria Theis, SSND, her cousin, Monica Wagner, SSND, and her niece and nephew-in-law, Mary Alice and Maurice Bless, and several sisters had supported her on her journey throughout the day.

The youngest of eleven children, Sister Annabelle was born on the feast of the Guardian Angels, October 2, 1932. At her baptism one week later at St. Mary of the Purification Church in Marystown, Minnesota, she was given a name that combined her grandmother's and her mother's names – Annabelle. She grew up on the family farm where her parents planted and nurtured the love of God in their children and helped them develop a strong work ethic with all children participating in the daily farm chores.

In 1938 Annabelle began first grade at St. Mary of the Purification School, where she was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame. Following eighth grade graduation in 1946, she entered the SSND Aspiranture at Good Counsel Academy, Mankato. She was well-acquainted with SSND life as three of her sisters had preceded her to the aspiranture and two of her mother's sisters (Sisters Leander and Jeanette Lenzmeier) were also School Sisters of Notre Dame, as was her father's aunt, Sister Maximilla Theis.

On August 28, 1950, Annabelle became the fourth Theis daughter to enter the SSND candidature. As a second-year candidate, she taught fourth grade at SS. Peter & Paul School, Mankato. It was during Christmas vacation of this year that her sister Valeria reentered the candidature following recovery from illness. Annabelle and Valeria were both received into the novitiate in 1952 and given forms of their parents' names: Annabelle became Sister William Marie and Valeria became Sister Isabel Marie. Both took their first vows on July 19, 1953. Both later returned to their baptismal names.

Sister Annabelle's first teaching assignment was St. Andrew School, St. Paul, where she taught intermediate grades from 1953 until 1960. Following two years at SS. Peter & Paul School, Blue Earth, she returned to St. Paul and taught one year at Sacred Heart. She was principal at St. Andrew from 1963 until 1965, and then spent the next five years at SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato, serving first as junior high teacher and then as principal. From 1970 through 1980, she taught at St. Matthew, St. Paul, and Shakopee Area Catholic Schools, and was principal at Holy Childhood and St. Francis de Sales, both in St. Paul. During her years of teaching and administration, Sister Annabelle earned a bachelor's degree in history and education from St. Catherine's College (1960) and a master's degree in administration from Notre Dame University (1969). She did post-graduate work at St. Thomas, the University of San Francisco, Boston College and Sacred Heart School of Theology.

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Annabelle Theis



In August, 1980, Sister Annabelle became a student in the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program at Abbott-Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis. From 1981 through 1989, she served in community administration at Good Counsel. Her responsibilities included planning and managing annual budgets; directing central purchasing; hiring, supervising and evaluating maintenance personnel; and managing the order's fleet of about 100 automobiles in ten states. Her first love, however, was working with teachers and students. In 1989, she applied for and became principal at Holy Childhood School in St. Paul, where she stayed until 1994.

In June 1994, Sister Annabelle became the first director of pastoral ministry for Nativity of Our Lord Parish in St. Paul. In a 2005 Nativity publication article, she is quoted, "Pastoral ministry was 'uncharted waters' for me. As an educator, you usually have a pretty good idea of what needs to be done and how to do it. Pastoral ministry is totally different – everything depends on the individual and where they are on life's journey." Sister Annabelle developed an outreach program that enabled the homebound and elderly to maintain an active faith life, an outreach program that was different for every person it served. Sister Annabelle retired from Nativity in 2005 and remained as a volunteer for one more year. From 2006 through 2010, she served in part-time ministry as a receptionist for Willwerscheid Funeral Home in St. Paul.

Sister Annabelle moved to Good Counsel in 2010. During her years in St. Paul, she and Sister Valeria had formed a special bond with an immigrant family. They continued this outreach on the Hill, and were often visited by the family. An excellent conversationalist, Sister Annabelle continued her love of learning as she participated in the "Word a Week" program in which participants learned and incorporated one new word each week into their conversations.

Throughout her life, Sister Annabelle journeyed with many of God's people. She has now completed her own journey. May she experience God's eternal companionship.

Her vigil service was Tuesday evening, August 4. The funeral Mass for Sister Annabelle, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was Wednesday, August 5, in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial in the cemetery. She is survived by her sister, Sister Valeria Theis, SSND, nieces and nephews, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, William and Isabel (Lenzmeier) Theis, her sisters Lucille Pauly, Jeanette Wolf, Georgia Rose Theis, Jean Marie (Luverna) Theis, SSND, Alice Kopp, Evelyn Theis and Marjorie Theis (both of whom died in infancy), and her brothers Harold and Alvin.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND

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