

In Loving Memory

Sister Catherine Chatleain, SSND



Birth
January 28, 1945

Baptism
February 11, 1945

Profession
July 17, 1965

Death
April 15, 2012

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

Sister Catherine Chatleain, 67, died peacefully Sunday, April 15, 2012, in Notre Dame Health Care, Good Counsel Campus, Mankato, Minnesota. Many of her classmates and other sisters had visited and prayed with her throughout the day, and several sisters, including our Provincial Leader, Sister Mary Anne Owens, were with her when she died.

Over 20 years ago, Sister Catherine developed symptoms of a neurological disease, later diagnosed as olivopontocerebellar atrophy (OPCA). Sister Catherine lived with OPCA for many years, and it ultimately caused her death at a relatively young age.

Sister Catherine was born in St. Joseph's Hospital, Mankato, on January 28, 1945. Her parents, Donald and Catherine (Simonett) Chatleain, and family resided northeast of Mankato in Cleveland, where her father managed the grain elevator. She was baptized Mary Kay on February 11 at the Church of the Nativity, Cleveland. When Mary Kay was two, the family moved to Franklin, Minnesota, where her father was again the elevator manager. Mary Kay had three older sisters – Lorraine, Betty and Phyllis, and a younger brother, Joseph.

Mary Kay attended Franklin Public School throughout grade and high school. She wrote in her autobiography, "On Wednesdays I went to catechism classes, taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. [In 1959 a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Center opened in Franklin, staffed by Sisters Margaret Ann (Mary) Boylan and Cortona (Olivia) Aydt.] Those Wednesday classes made this day the happiest of the week, since it gave me the opportunity to see the sisters and to learn about God. I was fortunate enough to live just two houses from the sisters and was very eager to do all they asked me to do. I knew the sisters were happy and loved everyone. They helped me so much to come closer to the One I loved, Christ. My father and mother, too, were a great help in the practice of my religion."

Sensing the call of a religious vocation, Mary Kay asked her parents for permission to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame at Good Counsel in Mankato after high school graduation in 1963. They readily gave their permission, and she became a postulant on September 1, 1963. At her reception into the novitiate in 1964, she was given the name Sister Mary Catherine but was known as Sister Catherine. At the conclusion of the three-day visit following reception, her parents said, "Be good, love God all you can, and pray for us. The year will pass quickly."

Sister Catherine was professed in 1965 and spent the next three years at Good Counsel working as a nursing assistant and helping in the health care kitchen. She wrote about this experience, "This was a beautiful life: to listen and just to care about older people." In 1969 she became the home service sister for St. Mary's Convent, Shakopee. She commented, "I had much to learn about being a cook, because being in nursing was so different. I found much help from the sisters, so we really had a happy home." While she was

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on mission, her parents, avid fishers, delighted in bringing fresh fish to share with the sisters. Sister Catherine also enjoyed fishing.

Sister Catherine then spent one year in the priests' department at Good Counsel, and also was a driver for the sisters. This was followed by a year as a home service sister at St. Stanislaus, Winona. From 1972 through 1987, she lived at Good Counsel where she was engaged in a number of ministries, including housekeeping and supervision of boarders at Good Counsel Academy, hair care for sisters in the motherhouse, and housekeeping and food service in the Education Center.

In 1987 she moved to St. Cloud where she provided home care for elderly women. At first she lived at Holy Spirit Convent and traveled to their homes; later she provided live-in care. In a résumé prepared at that time, she wrote that her objective was "to give loving and respectful service to the elderly," and continued, "My lived experience and work with the elderly sisters in St. Joseph Health Care most of my religious life, along with my work in St. Cloud, have prepared me with the necessary skills to fulfill a position in caring for the elderly in their homes."

With her class, Sister Catherine participated in the Rome Renewal program in 1990. At that time, the early symptoms of undiagnosed OPCA were beginning to show. Returning home, she continued her ministry in St. Cloud for three more years. When the progression of the disease made it impossible for her to continue, she returned to Good Counsel in August 1993. She remained as active as possible and displayed a wonderful sense of humor. She enjoyed visiting with staff members and sisters at daily coffee in the dining room. Her local community on the Hill was also very faithful to her.

The funeral Mass for Sister Catherine, with Father James Friedel, OSA, as presider, was on Thursday, April 19, in Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial in Good Counsel Cemetery.

From a young age, Sister Catherine knew she wanted to be a sister. For many years she lived with physical limitations. On April 15, the door opened, and Sister Catherine entered a new and eternal life of unrestrained happiness and joy with her Beloved. We rejoice with her!

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND