



**Birth**  
October 27, 1929

**Baptism**  
November 10, 1929

**Profession**  
July 30, 1951

**Death**  
February 19, 2013

**Burial**  
Notre Dame of  
Elm Grove Cemetery  
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

*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 Joan Frances [Mary Jonathan] Giere, SSND

In 1929, the John and Lorena (Brown) Giere family of Fort Wayne, Indiana, experienced two life-changing events. On October 27, 1929, two years after Lorena had been told that she would never bear another child, she, Joan Frances, was born and joined her two sisters and a brother. The following day, stocks crashed, banks collapsed and the Great Depression began. Joan Frances disclaimed any responsibility for the second occasion.

The Giere family had no car, so when the children went to school, they had their own free taxi service. Each day they trudged to their neighbor's house and Mr. Fabian would drive them to St. John Baptist School where the Sisters of Providence taught them. The children loved the sisters. Joan Frances recounts that one day, as her first grade teacher came to the side of her desk, the little tyke was so enamored of her teacher that she hugged the sister's legs. In those early years, her vocation began to sprout, also nourished later by her sister Alice's entrance into SSND.

Joan Frances attended high school at Central Catholic in Fort Wayne and it was in her junior year that she was taught by Notre Dames. At that time, she notes, her intention to become a sister had solidified, so much so that she spent much of her free time on the floor with a dictionary of the saints, picking out possible names for her reception.

After working for a year after high school at her father's request (just as he had asked her sister Alice to do) Joan Frances entered the candidature in 1948. She was thrilled that her big sister was there to dress her as a candidate. Already as a second year postulant, she had her first experience teaching a lively group of third graders – very lively. She called it “fun!” She professed her first vows on July 30, 1951 and her perpetual vows on July 30, 1957. She was given the religious name of Sister Mary Jonathan, but later returned to her baptismal name. She earned a bachelor's degree from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1963 and a master's degree in guidance and counseling from St. Francis College, Fort Wayne, in 1970. Additionally, she studied at Wayne University, Detroit where she received certification in art therapy, and was licensed by the State of Michigan in counseling and social work.

Teaching a mixture of grade levels, she went from primary to commercial, from intermediate to junior high and business, then to high school again. Her ministry locations included: St. Helena of the Cross, Chicago; St. James, Grand Rapids, Mich.; St. Alphonsus, Chicago; St. Mary, Menasha, Wis.; and in Detroit at East and West Catholic High Schools and at Benedictine High School. In 1969, she went to East Catholic High School in Detroit, a combination of two high schools in a changing, low-income neighborhood. Sister Joan Frances spent 14 years there, 11 as vice-principal, then three years teaching art and counseling. She said that she still wanted to work with black youth and the people of Detroit, but after 14 years, she felt it was time to move on.

The people of St. Anthony Congregation recognized the great asset that Sister Joan Frances was to the school and the parish. She had been an integral part

*continued*

# In Loving Memory



*Sister Joan Frances Giere*



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**School Sisters  
of Notre Dame**  
Central Pacific Province

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD  
THROUGH EDUCATION

of the community, serving on various commissions, the parish council, and the fund raising committee – especially the fund raising committee! In the parish choir she was an accomplished vocalist. She sang the black spirituals with such energy and perfection that they affectionately named her “The white Mahalia Jackson.” She was awarded the Martin Luther King, Jr. “Keep the Dream Alive” award at the St. Anthony Church celebration. The presenter summed up the parishioners’ feelings when she said, “Sister’s vibrant personality has endeared her to the entire St. Anthony Community.”

After some disappointing weeks and months job-hunting, Sister Joan Frances found a job at Benedictine High School as counselor. While there, her compelling interest in art spurred her on to seek a master’s equivalency in art therapy, which she did. For the next 18 years, her main occupation and delight was to work as a rehabilitation therapist in five different health care facilities and hospitals where she could shower her love and expertise on her mentally ill or psychologically frail clients. Through the years she developed such an excellent plan for teaching art therapy that the Michigan Association of Art Therapy acclaimed her as the Pioneer of Art Therapy in Michigan.

Busy as she was in her ministry, Joan Frances was a dedicated and active SSND community member. Early on, when SSNDs in Indiana, Michigan and Ohio were combining as a Tri-State Region, she wrote that she was determined to put her whole self into becoming involved in committees and communication in the region, which she did. She loved people, and her open heart went out to anyone who needed a heart’s concern.

In 2010, when she herself needed a heart’s concern because of advancing Parkinson’s disease, leaving Detroit and all it meant to her, and coming to Elm Grove, was extremely difficult. Accepting her diminishment was a daily challenge, and drew upon all the faith and trust that she could muster. She who enjoyed life, loved the color and beauty of nature, delighted in little four-legged creatures, loved to talk (too much at times, she admitted), and share and learn and paint, now was helpless. But she knew who it was who had watched over her, held her in love all her life. She could trust that love.

Sister Joan Frances Giere is survived by her brother, John E. Giere, her sister, Sister Alice Jeannette Giere, SSND, her brother-in-law, Raymond C. Alter, nieces, nephews, cousins, dear friends and the SSND Community. She was preceded in death by her parents, John and Lorena Giere and her sister, Ursula Alter.

In her heart she could sing for herself what she had so often sung for others.

A recording of “His Eye Is on the Sparrow,” sung by Sister Joan Frances was played at the end of the eulogy for those present at the wake service.

*By Sister Marie Le Clerc Laux, SSND*