

In Loving Memory

Sister M. Josepha Forster, SSND



Birth
June 1, 1917

Baptism
June 1, 1917

Profession
April 1, 1938

Death
September 10, 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 M. Josepha Forster, 95, died Monday, September 10, 2012, in Notre Dame Health Care Center, Our Lady of Good Counsel Campus, Mankato, Minnesota. Sister Josepha entered eternal glory exactly 100 years after the dedication of the Motherhouse and Academy of Our Lady of Good Counsel in 1912. Many sisters kept vigil with her in the days before her death.

Sister Josepha was born in Dorfgen, Germany, June 1, 1917, and baptized Victoria in St. Mary's Church the same day. Her father Martin was an auto mechanic in Dorfgen, and her mother Maria took care of the family of ten children, of which Victoria was the ninth. In her autobiography, she told of contracting diphtheria when she was two, which caused her to become blind for three months. During this time, she stayed at an eye clinic in Munich. Her mother prayed to Our Lady of Altötting (a nearby shrine) for Victoria's recovery, and she did regain her sight.

Victoria attended grade school in Dorfgen, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She wrote, "Edified and attracted by their sound religious spirit and truly Christian charity toward each other and their pupils, I had long wanted to join their ranks." In 1930, she entered the aspiranture in Weichs, Bavaria, and became a candidate in Munich in 1933. She returned to Weichs as a teaching candidate. During this time the German government under Hitler dismissed sisters from the German schools. With over 3,000 sisters dependent on teachers' salaries and tuition for their support, Mother Almeda looked for other options which included sending sisters from Germany to North and South America and European countries not dominated by Hitler. The candidates in Victoria's class were offered the opportunity to emigrate. Initially, she did not volunteer; however, when she learned about a double tragedy that befell one of the volunteers, Victoria offered to take her place. The volunteer candidates were called to Munich for reception, and Victoria was given the name M. Josepha. After making her novitiate in Breslau, she professed her vows on April 1, 1938. Three weeks later, 16 sisters, including Sister Josepha, left for the United States. Sister Josepha's younger sister, Sister M. Osmunda, a kindergarten teacher and organist, did not leave Germany, in part because some sisters were allowed to conduct kindergartens. Sister Osmunda's health was poor, and the wartime stress weakened her more. She died in 1946 at the age of 27.

The sisters arrived in New York on April 29, 1938, and spent several days in Notch Cliff, Maryland. Then Sister Josepha and two others took the train to Mankato and arrived on May 5. She spent the summer studying English and in September began teaching first and second grades at Assumption School, St. Paul. Sister Josepha reflected on this experience, "Though the difficulties arising from my limited knowledge of the English language were great at first, the opportunity of attending Saturday classes and the helpful patience of my companion sisters soon helped me overcome this obstacle." As an alien resident she was not allowed to travel more than ten miles without U.S. Court permission. Sister Josepha became a U.S. citizen in 1944, and was transferred to St. Stanislaus, St. Paul, where she stayed until 1946. She had

continued

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very limited contact with her family during the war; only very short, greatly-delayed messages relayed via the Red Cross were allowed.

In 1946, Sister Josepha was transferred to New England, North Dakota, where she taught primary grades. She also earned her B.A. from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, Wis., in 1946. In 1948, she moved to St. Benedict School, Strasburg, N.D. In 1961, Sister Josepha was transferred to All Saints, Madison Lake, Minn. where she taught junior high grades. She was directress of the Junior Sisters at Good Counsel (1963-65), and then taught high school at St. Felix, Wabasha, Minn., for one year. During this time, she earned an M.A. in Spanish and German from Notre Dame University. From 1966 until 1981, Sister Josepha taught Spanish and German at Totino-Grace High School, Fridley, Minn. In 1968 and 1970, she acted as a simultaneous translator for the SSND General Chapters.

When Sister Josepha realized that she could no longer continue teaching due to some hearing loss, she began a ministry in health care in 1981. She attended classes and became a nursing assistant at Regina Memorial Hospital in Hastings, Minn. Later, she worked in the medical records department. She remained in Hastings until she moved to Good Counsel in 2001. Her retirement was interrupted in 2004 by a request to translate a German martyrology of the twentieth century. Translating over 1,300 pages of text took her two years of five to six-hour days to complete. In her retirement, she enjoyed her midmorning coffee and maintained a strong interest in anything connected to her German heritage.

Sister Josepha stayed in contact with her family, and was able to return to Germany a few times. Her nieces and nephews sent her a family picture, and she wrote, "I 'visit' with them whenever I sit down at my work table; their faces look so real."

In 2008, Sister Josepha reflected on her 70 years of religious life, "I've been very happy living and working as an SSND because I love religious life and the people I worked with in each ministry." May Sister Josepha, who looked to the Lord during her 74 years of life as a School Sister of Notre Dame, now be eternally radiant with joy!

The funeral Mass for Sister Josepha, with Father Ted Hottinger, S.J., as presider, was Monday, September 17. Her family is requesting a memorial Mass for Sister Josepha at the motherhouse in Munich at a later date. She is survived by nieces and nephews in Germany. She was preceded in death by her parents, Martin and Maria (Lieberth) Forster, five brothers and four sisters.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND