



## *In Loving Memory*

### Sister Maria Goretti Stefani, SSND

**B**oth of Sister Maria's parents were of Italian ancestry. Her father John Stefani, was born in Algeria, Africa, and her mother Caroline Stefani (nee Gualdoni), in Herrin, Ill. Sister Maria was born in the east side of Detroit, November 19, 1930, and baptized Caroline Edith at San Francisco Church. She speaks lovingly of her older sister, Mary Ann, who gave her a taste for reading and was a wonderful confidante. Frances, her junior by a year, was her constant companion. According to Sister Maria, her younger sister, with her bouncing curls and dimples, resembled Shirley Temple.

**Birth**  
November 19, 1930

**Baptism**  
March 22, 1931

**Profession**  
July 20, 1950

**Death**  
February 3, 2013

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

When Sister Maria was three years old her parents separated. Her mother carried on valiantly, raising her three daughters and enabling them to lead faith-filled, productive lives. Maria went to public school for ten years, CCD classes on Sunday, and St. Anthony High School for one year. In her autobiography, she wrote, "I wasn't your usual candidate for the religious life! But the Lord did call and after attending St. Anthony High School for one year, I entered the SSND motherhouse..."

Her entrance, as a candidate was August 31, 1947. Sister Maria professed her first vows on July 20, 1950 and her perpetual vows on July 20, 1956. She earned a bachelor's degree in history from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1961 and a master's degree in administration and supervision from DePaul University, Chicago, in 1973.

Sister Maria ministered as an educator for 30 years, predominately working with students in the junior high grades. Her first mission was to Holy Guardian Angels in Chicago, where the sisters lived in part of the school. The parish was too poor to afford a convent. These were very happy years. Teaching was a joy and challenge. Other ministry locations were: St. Aloysius, West Allis; St. Luke, Gary, Ind.; St. Mary, Menasha, Wis.; St. Alphonsus, Chicago; St. Adalbert, Grand Rapids, Mich.; St. Hyacinth, Milwaukee; St. James, Mukwonago, Wis.; and East Catholic High School, Detroit.

When she was 35 she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Still she kept on 15 more years in part time teaching and library work. Sister Maria noted how her family and the sisters were always very supportive. She experienced a hip replacement, a pin in the other hip, two bouts with pneumonia and in the summer of 1980, systemic lupus brought complete debilitation. She wrote, "I put myself in the hands of the Lord and entered Notre Dame Health Care Center."

Sister Maria added sparkle to the community. She and Sister Thomas Damian Meaney would listen to the residents and bring ideas forward which were helpful to all concerned. Sister Maria, true daughter of Italy, suggested grapes for a treat at a community gathering. She was a lodestar to classmates of the 1950 profession group, helping them keep in touch, partly through connecting to her. She was always interested in what was happening in mission life. With her crippled hands and poor eyesight she

*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

*continued*

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would make and send beautiful cards for festive occasions. In recent years she had scribes to help her.

Her last full day of life was February 2, the day when the Gospel proclaims Simeon's Nunc Dimittis. "Now, Lord, you may let your servant go in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation."

Sister Maria Goretti Stefani is survived by her half-sister Penny Elve, nieces, dear friends and the SSND Community. She was preceded in death by her parents John and Caroline and two sisters, Mary Ann Thurman and Frances Orjada.

A wake service and Mass of Christian Burial were celebrated on February 6 at The Holy Family Chapel, Notre Dame of Elm Grove. Following the eulogy and remembrances shared, a much loved song of her class, "Evening Hymn to Our Lady" was sung by the sisters present, to express gratitude for Sister Maria Goretti and for our Lady's care for each of us. May Sister Maria now rejoice in celebrating the fullness of her new life with our Risen Savior!

*By Sister Joan Emily Kaul, SSND*