

# *In Loving Memory*

## Sister Mary Cecily Brill, SSND



Birth  
April 1, 1926

Baptism  
April 11, 1926

Profession  
August 11, 1946

Death  
May 21, 2012

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

Clearly, a glowing sparkle in Sister Mary Cecily's life was the blessing of her family: loving parents, three older brothers and three sisters – one older and two younger. She was born on Holy Thursday in Appleton, Wisconsin and baptized Dorothy Elizabeth Susan. Two years later the family moved to Milwaukee.

Because her older brother would not be separated from her, Dorothy accompanied him to school at age three and a half. The School Sisters of Notre Dame were her teachers at St. Leo grade school, where, at age ten, her musical career began with Sister Mariangela Henrich. It was a special moment when her next teacher, Sister Cedella Dengel, took her to the choir loft of St. Leo's for her first lesson on the magnificent organ. "Words cannot express that tremendous joy. Organ work has been a great pleasure to me throughout the years," Sister wrote in her autobiography.

Music played a great part in the Brill family home. Her mother, Dorothy and two of her sisters were pianists and two were also violinists. Her father's fine tenor voice and the good voices of the boys resulted in many a song fest.

Dorothy's first serious consideration of a religious vocation happened during a retreat in her freshman year at Mercy High School. The next years at Messmer High kept her in touch again with SSNDs. So it was that on September 6, 1943, she entered the SSND candidature. That evening the circle of new candidates sat in the courtyard, saddle shoes sticking out from under their black dresses, listening to Mother Mary Fidelis Krieter. Commenting on the sky's blazing reds, purples and pinks, Mother said, "God is writing His welcome in the sky."

Two years later, shortly before Dorothy's reception into the novitiate, her mother brought the good news that her sister Mary, our Sister Angeleen, would be entering the candidature. "What an added joy to my religious life," Sister's autobiography reads. Somehow during that next year – not knowing how it happened – the novice and the candidate Brill sisters would find themselves washing the same set of windows in the arcade – one on each side. Dorothy received the religious name of Mary Cecily and professed her first vows on August 11, 1946.

Sister Cecily brought her love of music and her expertise as an organist, choir director, classroom music teacher, and private piano and organ instructor to various locations.

1946: Holy Cross, Milwaukee, Wis.

1952: St. Augustine, Milwaukee, Wis.

1954: St. Peter, Beaver Dam, Wis.

1961: St. Joseph, Escanaba, Mich.

1964: St. John De Nepomuc, Milwaukee, Wis.

*continued*

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

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD  
THROUGH EDUCATION

1971: Immaculate Heart of Mary, West Allis, Wis.

1972: St. Aloysius, West Allis, Wis.

1975: St. Joseph, Wauwatosa, Wis.

1976: Visitation, Elm Grove, Wis., Christ King and St. Joseph, Wauwatosa, Wis.

1978: Visitation, Elm Grove, Wis. and Christ King, Wauwatosa, Wis.

Sister’s professional education at Mount Mary College, Milwaukee; DePaul University, Chicago; and St. Norbert College, DePere, Wis., continued through the years, along with her work load.

Profession classmates remember that when they arrived in Rome for their special renewal experience at the time of their silver jubilee, Sister Cecily’s suitcase did not arrive until weeks later. They still joke about practicing their vows and the spirit of community through their sharing – literally – of “our dress,” “our pajamas,” and more!

As her active life wore down, she remained thoughtful and helpful – doing many of the little extra things she delighted in doing throughout her life: knitting or sewing articles for family, friends and the poor, as well as helping her primary-grade-teacher-sister, Sister Angeleen, with bulletin boards.

“Life is a song. God’s love is the music,” read a plaque on the wall of Sister Cecily’s room. In 1994, after 48 years of spreading God’s love through her gift of music, Sister retired to Notre Dame of Elm Grove. During her last years of needing more care, Sister would remark to those who visited her at Havenwood and then in the Theresa II unit: “I am very grateful to the nurses and aides for their loving care. Our family is also.”

On a decorative stone, which was in Sister Cecily’s room, are the words:

“Only one thing matters  
That wherever you go  
And however you go  
Keep a song in your heart.”

The song of Sister Cecily’s heart was “YES.” Grateful for her life and her “songs,” we wish for her eternal peace in the embrace of her Beloved.

A visitation and wake service were celebrated May 24, 2012, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial at Holy Family Chapel, Notre Dame of Elm Grove. Sister Cecily is survived by two sisters, Sister Angeleen Brill, SSND and Joan Bryant, nieces, nephews, other relatives, friends and the SSND community.

*By Sister Joan Emily Kaul, SSND and Sister Lucy Nigh, SSND*