



Birth

March 19, 1920

Baptism

March 31, 1920

First Profession

July 21, 1946

Death

April 11, 2015

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

In Loving Memory

Sister Mary José Zender, SSND

Sister Mary José Zender, 95, died Saturday, April 11, 2015, in Notre Dame Health Care, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minn. In her SSND ministry she served first as an elementary and secondary teacher, and then as province and motherhouse seamstress.

Sister Mary José wrote about her birth, “On the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1920, in a terrific snowstorm, I was born to good Catholic parents, Michael Zender and Rose Rathman Zender. I was immediately baptized, named Josephine Ardelle, tucked in a downy blanket, put in a shoebox and placed in a warming oven with the prayer ‘St. Joseph, build a secret door around this eighth child of ours.’” Ardelle, as she was called, had the rite of baptism completed at the Church of St. James, St. James, Minnesota, on March 31. Sister Mary José described her family life on the farm between St. James and Butterfield: “There were seven girls and three boys in the creative, competitive, fun-loving family. Our parents taught us a deep sense of accountability and responsibility to each other and for our neighbors. They believed in empowering each child with a deep faith and a good education through good schools, Farm Bureau and 4-H work. They taught us that the family farm was our family bank and we took great pride in making it run smoothly and successfully.”

Ardelle attended Butterfield Public School for most of her elementary and secondary education. However, during the years that she received the sacraments of penance, Holy Eucharist and confirmation, she stayed with her aunt and attended the Catholic school in St. James, where she was taught by Franciscan Sisters. During her high school years, she worked as a clerk and buyer for local stores. Following graduation in 1938, she took a job at the jewelry store, where she clerked in the silverware, glassware and chinaware departments. That position soon expanded, as she explained, “After a few months our jeweler took me to the bank, where I was ‘bonded’ – given the keys and the secrets of the vault, with the privilege of selling diamonds, watches and other precious jewelry.” She worked at the store until 1943, when she made plans to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was familiar with SSND, because of an aunt, Sister Lucinia Zender in the former Milwaukee Province and an older sister, Luverne – Sister Mary Virginia in the former Mankato Province who were already members.

Sister Mary José later wrote in a reflection based on John 15:10, “Why did I want to give up this world for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven? ... It took a great leap of faith to surrender what I really knew for the great unknown! Yet the mystery of religious life always intrigued me. Gradually as I grew in wisdom and grace, I realized it is life that leads to a greater and more radical following of Jesus in celibacy, poverty and obedience.” She entered the SSND candidature in 1943 and became a novice in 1945, receiving the name Mary José.

Sister Mary José professed first vows in 1946 and began a ministry of teaching. She taught at St. Stanislaus, St. Paul; Holy Rosary, North

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Mary Josél Zender



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

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD
THROUGH EDUCATION

Mankato; St. Stanislaus, Winona; St. Felix, Wabasha; St. Mary, New England, N.D.; St. Francis de Sales, St. Paul; St. Dominic, Northfield; Don Bosco, Gilbertville, Iowa; Emmons Central, Strasburg, N.D.; Holy Childhood, St. Paul; St. Adalbert, Silver Lake; Lonsdale-New Market-Veseli Catholic School; and St. Agnes, St. Paul. She earned a teaching certificate from Diocesan Teachers College, St. Paul, in 1949 and a degree in education with a home economics major in 1955 from Mount Mary College. During her years as a teacher, she received several grants including the Freedom's Foundation, Valley Forge, Pa.; a political science grant from the University of Colorado, Boulder; and the Foundation in Economic Education (FEE) from Irvington on the Hudson, N.Y. In 1974 she was accepted as a teacher and counselor for the Scholastic International European travel program, "Culture of Man" University on Wheels. She accompanied students as they traveled through England, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. She was also active in the Red Cross and received the Red Cross Medal for Service in 1975.

Her background in home economics prepared Sister Mary Josél for her next ministry – that of seamstress for the sisters of the former Mankato Province. Beginning in 1969, School Sisters of Notre Dame could change from the traditional habit to modern dress. During the 1970-71 academic year, Sister Mary Josél worked in the Good Counsel sewing department, helping sisters make this transition. She taught for four more years at St. Agnes, and then returned to Good Counsel in 1975. She worked for a short time in the interprovincial communications department, and then became the resident seamstress until her retirement in 2001. She also traveled to convents, sharing her sewing skills with sisters on mission who were very grateful for this service. At Good Counsel, her role expanded to driver and purchaser, as well as seamstress, and she conducted classes in sewing as part of the Education Center's summer program. She continued to provide community service after her years in the sewing department.

Sister Mary Josél's reflection provides an apt conclusion: "To live in the Father's vineyard has been a privilege. It will always be mystery to me why He chose me. ... I can truly look into the face of God and say, 'Lord, if it weren't for You, I wouldn't be here. You are the author, norm, goal and achievement of my whole life. Alleluia!'"

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Josél, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, is Wednesday, April 15, in Good Counsel Chapel, Mankato, followed by burial in the cemetery. She is survived by one sister, Eunice Wickstrom, one sister-in-law, Ruth, nieces and nephews, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, Michael and Rose (Rathman) Zender, her sisters, Sister Mary Virginia Zender, SSND, Loretta Hovden, DeVota Stolze, Irene Gross and Rose Schwab, and her brothers Francis, Stanley, and Donald.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND