

In Loving Memory

Sister Regina M. Zolner, SSND



Birth
September 19, 1918

Baptism
September 26, 1918

Profession
August 12, 1937

Death
December 18, 2012

Burial
Chatawa Cemetery
Chatawa, Mississippi

*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

Regina Marie Zolnerowicz was the seventh of nine children born to Mary (Myszkowski) Zolnerowicz and Joseph Zolnerowicz. She was born in Sugar Notch, Pennsylvania, on September 19, 1918, and was baptized in Holy Family Church a week later.

Regina, with her four brothers and four sisters, was nurtured by her “hardworking, loving, and religious parents.” This was a close-knit family headed by parents who had emigrated from Poland. Naturally the first language in the home was Polish.

With her brothers and sisters, she attended Holy Family School in Sugar Notch. Regina related, “I started school where the Bernardine Sisters were teaching. Though only six, I knew immediately that I wanted to be a sister. Through my eight years in grade school my wish to be a nun grew. In the months following the end of school, I made my desire known to the Sisters.”

The Sisters arranged for Regina to live at and attend Mount Avernia Academy, in Reading Pennsylvania. The Academy was associated with the motherhouse.

Regina’s eagerness to be a religious was steadfast. She entered the Bernardine Sisters of St. Francis in Reading, Pa. and professed her vows in 1937. She received the name, Augustian.

After profession, Sister taught children in the elementary schools in New Jersey and Pennsylvania then, still as a Bernardine, she taught at Christ the King and St. Rita School in Dallas.

During her last years in the Dallas ministry, Sister was elected Provincial Superior of the Bernadines. She resigned from this leadership role and... in her words, “I spent two years of painful discernment. I chose to transfer to my present community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In this community I found the width and breadth I needed for inner growth and for exploration of the possibilities and challenges for this growth. However I love both communities.” Sister was a member of the Bernardine community for 36 years and interestingly — of SSND for 37 years.

During two years, Sister prepared to make a commitment according to the Constitution of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In February 1975, she made this commitment. At the time of her congregation transfer, Sister asked to return to her baptismal name, Regina. She legally changed her family name to Zolner.

Now, Regina in exploring the possibilities for growth, was drawn to the health care, counseling ministry. She gained certification as a licensed vocational nurse and completed the clinical pastoral education program. Sister Regina became one of the first women in the Dallas Parkland Hospital chaplaincy staff.

continued

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THROUGH EDUCATION

Sister Regina wrote of Parkland, “Being a county hospital, there was poverty, illness, loneliness everywhere. I feel I am called to build up His Body, am called to be an extension of His love and mercy to the sick, the lonely, the dying, those in need.” Regina became known as “the angel of the hospital and the Mother Theresa of Parkland.” Evidence shows these titles were well earned. As an example, Sister Regina’s fluency in the Polish language was a lifeline to the frequent ethnic Polish patient. Regina would be called — even in the middle of the night — to translate. Regina became adept in Spanish in order to meet a greater need. At the time of the Delta Airline crash in Dallas, Regina served 24/7 until the trauma victims had been stabilized and comforted. This was all the more heroic knowing that Regina suffered from serious back and foot problems. Regina helped to nourish their souls and their bodies. Many related Regina’s service to the poor even her begging for food for destitute families and helping to furnish their homes.

She was tired. At age 74 and after 19 years in hospital ministry, Sister Regina retired from full-time service in 1992. Reflection and volunteer services filled her time until a family need called her. Her characteristic closeness to her family made it almost a given that she would respond to the needs of her infirm sister in New Jersey. So from 1996 until her retirement to St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Miss. in 2004, she was missioned to this family care.

Sister Regina probably best describes a significant element of her life to this time, as well as the next eight years in real retirement, “Even at this late stage of my life, the tension between what I am now and what I want to be, compels me to begin anew again and again.”

Before being bedridden during this last year, she celebrated the 75th anniversary of her first profession with great enthusiasm. Soon after this she declined rather rapidly. Sister Regina went peacefully into eternal life with her Sisters praying at her side, in her convent home in the evening of December 18, 2012.

Sister Regina’s parents preceded her in death. Her eight siblings are also deceased. She is survived by several nieces and nephews none of whom were able to attend the Eucharistic Celebration and burial of their aunt.

Morning prayer and visitation were at St. Teresa Church in Chatawa. The Eucharistic Celebration followed. Rev. Thomas Potts, SVD was celebrant. Burial was in the Chatawa cemetery.

By Sister MarieClare Powell, SSND