



Birth
Oct. 28, 1945

Baptism
Oct. 30, 1945

Profession
July 17, 1965

Death
Oct. 28, 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 Barbara [M. Francella] Simek, SSND

Sister Barbara Simek died on her 70th birthday, Oct. 28, 2015, in Notre Dame Healthcare, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. Following a cancer diagnosis about two years ago, she continued to live as full a life as possible. In September she entered Hospice. Sister Barbara's sister, Marcie Schleeve, her daughter, and several sisters were with her when she died.

Sister Barbara was born in Lonsdale, Minnesota, on Oct. 28, 1945, the third child and third daughter in the family. She was baptized Barbara Ann two days later at Immaculate Conception Church, Lonsdale. Two more girls and seven boys later completed the family of 12 children. She entered first grade at Immaculate Conception School in 1951, where she was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame. She later wrote, "Having School Sisters of Notre Dame as teachers all through grade school, and seeing how happy they were, I decided I would be one." After completing eighth grade, she made the decision to become an aspirant at Good Counsel in Mankato, but left after two weeks because of severe homesickness.

Barbara attended New Prague High School, graduating in 1963. She described the next step in her call to SSND: "After completing my education in a public school, I had to make a decision once again. I knew I had a religious vocation, so I chose to come back to Good Counsel. I entered the postulate on September 1, 1963." During her postulate year, Barbara began her preparation to be a home service sister, learning skills that would be helpful in this ministry.

Barbara was received into the novitiate in 1964 and given the name Sister Mary Francella. She later returned to her baptismal name. Following profession of vows in 1965, she worked in the Good Counsel kitchen for one year under the tutelage of Sister Stanisla Sticka. She then looked forward to mission life, hoping to be in a small community somewhere in the province, but she was missioned across the Hill to Good Counsel Academy, where she helped provide meals and other services for resident students. In 1970 she moved to St. Francis de Sales, St. Paul, a mission of 15 sisters. She commented, "I enjoyed it very much because there were many interesting foods I could make and I was able to get to know the sisters."

In 1971 Sister Barbara was transferred to SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato, where she stayed one year, and was then called back to Good Counsel Academy. In 1975, she worked a short time in the motherhouse kitchen and then in November, began working at another boarding school, St. Mary, in New England, North Dakota, where she stayed until 1977. During her years in Mankato she took a number of cooking and baking classes at Mankato Vocational School. She spent part of 1977 at Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary, Winona, and then returned to Good Counsel. In 1981, she moved to SS. Peter & Paul, where her home service ministry evolved into parish ministry. Her baking and cooking skills were a part of her ministry as she provided treats for various gatherings.

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Barbara Simek



Sister Barbara's food service ministry took a new direction in 1988 when she again joined the staff of Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Seminary in Winona, Minnesota. In addition to taking care of the seminarians' physical hunger (many of them reported gaining weight in their seminary years), Sister Barbara was a calm, listening presence for the young men.

In 1997 Sister Barbara left IHM and became the coordinator of hospitality for Good Counsel Education Center. In June 1998, after a six-month sabbatical, she moved to Prior Lake, Minnesota and began another facet of her food service ministry, working at both the Franciscan Retreat Center and in the Prior Lake School lunch program. After six months, she worked only in the school lunch program and was on the staff of Kids Company, an after-school childcare service. During her years in Prior Lake, she was also active in the parish, bringing Communion to the homebound and serving as a receptionist for evening events. In 2008, Sister Barbara became assistant food service manager at Grainwood School in Prior Lake, a position she held until illness necessitated her move to Our Lady of Good Counsel in early 2014.

Sister Barbara shared her baking skills with her SSND community and with the larger community as well. For many years she coordinated the baking of hundreds of loaves of bread for the Good Counsel Craft Fair. In 2003 she was recognized in the Mankato Free Press for her contribution to an annual fund raiser for VINE Faith in Action, a Mankato outreach group. The article began, "Sister Barbara Simek's cookie recipes don't call for cups of anything. A batch of her cookies needs pounds of ingredients – 18 pounds of flour and 10 pounds of brown sugar. Sister Simek is the main mixer of cookie dough for the 36,000 cookies baked for the VINE Faith in Action fund raiser each year."

Willing to be of service wherever she could, she volunteered as a summer driver at Good Counsel and helped in other capacities. At different times in her ministry, she worked at a shelter for battered women, volunteered for a summer in Honduras, worked in summer migrant programs and volunteered for Birthright. In the two years following her cancer diagnosis, she stayed as involved in activities as she was able. She could often be found praying in one of the back chapel pews. She remained close to her large family, and they in turn were close to her.

A prayer service was held on Nov. 3, at 9 a.m. followed by visitation until the funeral Mass at 10:30 a.m., in the chapel at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. Father Timothy Reker was the presider for the Mass. Sister Barbara is survived by her sisters, Rose (Tom) Novotny, Marge (Dave) Nordwall and Marcie (Tim) Schleeve, and her brothers, Frank (Agnes), John (Ann Schultz), George (Diane), Ed (Geneva), and Tom (Val), and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, Frank and Lillian (Voracek) Simek, her brothers, Joe and Gilbert, and a sister, Lucy Lilienthal-Molitor.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND

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