



**Birth**  
January 22, 1934

**Baptism**  
January 23, 1934

**Profession**  
July 17, 1960

**Death**  
December 28, 2017

**Burial**  
Our Lady of Good Counsel  
Cemetery

*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 Brenda Penning

Sister Brenda Penning, 83, died Thursday, December 28, 2017, in Notre Dame Health Care, Good Counsel Hill, Mankato, Minnesota. She had been experiencing declining health for some time.

The fifth child in her family, Sister Brenda was born on January 22, 1934, on a farm three miles south of Ashton, Iowa. The next day, she was baptized Dorothy Anna at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Ashton. She attended grades 1-12 at St. Joseph School in Ashton, where her teachers were Franciscan Sisters from Dubuque, Iowa. She graduated from high school in 1951, and remained at home to help on the farm for a few years.

From December 1954 to March 1957, she worked in the newspaper office in Sheldon, Iowa. Her official title was bookkeeper, but she did a little bit of everything. In April 1957, she and a friend moved to Mankato, Minnesota, seeking employment. She commented, "Really, we came to Mankato looking for a 'Catholic husband.' We both loved to dance and the Kato Ballroom was in Mankato, and George's was in New Ulm. We thought Mankato was a good place to make our home." She began work as an assistant secretary at SS. Peter & Paul parish office where the pastor put Dorothy and her friend in touch with the Dominic Club, a Catholic singles group.

The next February, Dorothy began working as a long distance telephone operator. Her story continues: "I had always wanted to be a telephone operator but found that after my dream came true, I was still restless and dissatisfied. St. John's Church was near the telephone office, and I saw sisters bringing children to Mass during Lent. I thought, 'I could never be one of them.' By the time I walked home from work, I found myself thinking, 'Maybe.'" After a Lenten day of recollection that was followed by much thought and prayer, she called Good Counsel, made an appointment with vocation personnel – and entered the SSND candidature in August 1958. She was received into the novitiate in 1959, and was given the name Sister M. Brenda. Following profession of vows in 1960, she and her classmates remained at Good Counsel to continue their education. Practice teaching was included in this year; Sister Brenda's assignment was fourth grade at St. John's, the site of her original attraction to SSND.

In 1961, Sister Brenda began her teaching ministry at St. Donatus, Iowa, where she stayed until 1965. She also taught at Blessed Sacrament, Waterloo, Iowa (1965-68); St. Michael, Prior Lake, Minnesota (1968-70); Project Discovery, St. Paul (1970-72); Christ the King, Omak, Washington (1972-73); Holy Family, Clarkston, Washington (1973-77); and St. Mary, Worthington, Minnesota (1977-81). She earned a bachelor's from Mount Mary College in 1968 and a master's in pastoral ministry from Creighton University in 1983.

While teaching at Worthington, Sister Brenda became involved in broader parish activities including the Marriage Encounter team, the

*continued*

# In Loving Memory



*Sister Brenda Penning*



To make a memorial gift,  
please visit our secure  
online donation page  
[www.ssndcentralpacific.org/donate](http://www.ssndcentralpacific.org/donate)



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

Transforming the world  
through education

Beginning Experience support group and the Parish Council and Liturgy Committee. In 1981, she became a pastoral minister and religious education coordinator at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Rochester, Minnesota, a position she held until 1983. She served as director of sponsored programs at Good Counsel Education Center from 1983 until 1987, when she returned to pastoral ministry at St. Joseph in New Hampton, Iowa. In 1993, she became motherhouse community leader.

In June 1995, Sister Brenda received a letter from Bishop John Vlazny of the Winona Diocese, which stated in part: "Sister Brenda, it gives me great pleasure to appoint you Parish Director of St. Anthony's Church, Lismore, and St. Killian's Church, St. Killian, effective June 28, 1995...I make this appointment because of the scarcity of priests available for pastoral leadership here in the Diocese of Winona... [You are] the first parish director of the Diocese of Winona, and I cannot thank you enough for accepting this call." Sister Brenda was responsible for the pastoral leadership of the parishes, and two diocesan priests were named sacramental ministers.

Sister Brenda served as parish director until 1999, when she became a pastoral associate at St. Joseph the Worker, Mankato. Following a sabbatical in 2002-2003, she was a parish minister in the parishes of St. Agnes and Immaculate Conception, Kellogg, and St. Felix, Wabasha. She was challenged by progressive hearing loss, and this may have contributed to her decision to accept the invitation to come to Good Counsel in 2008. She assumed the position of coordinator of liturgical ministers, which involved recruiting, training and scheduling all who served in any liturgical role on the Hill. She worked in this capacity until 2013.

Sister Brenda enjoyed traveling and also liked to spend time with her family. She was known for her gentle nature. As she prepared for her Golden Jubilee in 2010, she wrote, "Celebrating my 50th Jubilee means being thankful for the countless gifts, graces and blessings God has lavished so richly upon me during these 50 years. From God's patient nudging me over and over again to respond to His call to give my all as a School Sister of Notre Dame, to God's standing with me through the times of challenges and pain, and then rejoicing with me through these countless wonderful times of joy, quiet peace and tremendous love, God has been and always is with me."

The funeral liturgy, with Father Joseph Fogal as presider, was held January 3, in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial of her cremains in Good Counsel Cemetery. A prayer service of remembrance preceded the funeral liturgy. She is survived by her sisters, Theresa McCarty, Marian Penning and Christine Solko, nieces and nephews, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND Associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, Lawrence and Ann (Schwarz) Penning, her sisters, Mildred Schnurr and Helen Peplau, and her brothers Robert, Leonard and George.

*This remembrance was prepared by Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND.*