



Birth
Feb. 25, 1925

Baptism
March 8, 1925

Profession
July 18, 1952

Death
July 4, 2016

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

In Loving Memory

Sister Christyn Willems, SSND

Born Feb. 25, 1925 in Kenosha, Wisconsin, to Henry and Christine (Mangel) Willems, she was baptized Magdalen Rose at St. George Church, Kenosha. She and younger siblings, Henry, Jr. and Sally grew up in a family where there was a close bond of love. In her autobiography, Magdalen described her parents as “God-loving and self-sacrificing, always having the interest of their children at heart.”

One statement related to her early years that gave a hint of her future – “My parents taught us how to handle money” – for she spent almost 60 years in the field of business, either working or teaching in this area with most of those years as a School Sister of Notre Dame.

Magdalen went to St. George for her elementary education but because there was no Catholic high school in Kenosha, she attended and graduated from Kenosha Senior High. Though she began considering a religious vocation in the eighth grade, following her high school graduation she went to work for a loan company and then at American Motors.

After four years in the business world, she began studies at Mount Mary College, Milwaukee. Following her junior year, she entered the SSND candidature. During the first year of candidature, she completed her last year of college, receiving a bachelor’s in business administration at Mount Mary College in 1950. As a second-year candidate, she taught at Messmer High School, Milwaukee. Received as a novice in 1951, she was given the religious name, Mary Christyn. She professed first vows July 18, 1952. She earned a master’s degree in business education at the University of Detroit in 1972.

Sister Christyn served in business education for more than 50 years. She instructed secondary students for 21 years, teaching business subjects and religion at Messmer High School, Milwaukee; Longwood Academy, Chicago; Central Catholic High School, Fort Wayne, Indiana; and Catholic Central High School, Marinette, Wisconsin.

Frequently, she moderated the Sodality group or the Catholic Action Youth group at the high schools, giving her the opportunity to acquaint her students with people most in need through visits and service to nursing home patients, residents in mental health facilities and children with special needs.

In 1972, she was called to Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, as business instructor and registrar. In 1977, she was named as chair of the business department, serving in that role for 10 years. Her appointment as chair came just at the right time for the department. Prior to this, students in business had been primarily interested in the secretarial program; however, now women were seeing themselves in a wide variety of roles in the business world.

In addition, Mount Mary was initiating the Campus P.M. program, enabling students to get a degree by taking classes in the evening only. This program

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Christyn Willemms



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

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD
THROUGH EDUCATION

frequently attracted older women who had never been to college before and when they inquired about getting a degree in business, their advisor was Sister Christyn who had just the right skills for the job. She was someone who took the time to listen to their concerns, helped them see how they might manage their family life while being a student, and gave them the confidence to take up this new challenge. She made herself available from early morning through late evening to advise and register new students. As a result the number of business majors grew within a two-year period from seven to 150 students.

She taught courses in business administration until retirement in 1999. Sister Christyn inspired future teachers to strive for excellence as educators. Additionally, she assisted low income students with computer and communications skills, enabling them to become employed; to advance in their current job; or to achieve their goal of entering college. While this was a challenging experience, she also found great joy in working with these students and rejoicing in their success.

Throughout her life, Sister kept close bonds with her relatives. But the best evidence of her commitment to family was her devotion to her mother after her father died. For 15 years, she spent each weekend in Kenosha to be with and to help her mother and this continued until her mother died at age 101.

Sister Christyn recounted in her autobiography, how all during her life, she felt the presence of God guiding her. She was grateful for the opportunities she was given with a highlight being the privilege of making a 30-day retreat.

In 2010, Sister Christyn moved from Mount Mary College to the Notre Dame of Elm Grove community, where she continued to minister by her prayer and presence.

With every task she was assigned, Sister Christyn showed great strength and determination and this was so true in her last task, that of dying. The fact that she lived much longer than anticipated by her doctor seemed less due to any treatment but more to her prayer, her faith and her determination to live.

Sister Christyn died July 4, 2016 at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. She was 91. She is survived by her dear sister Sally Hookey, loving extended family of nieces and nephews, cousins, dear friends and the SSND Community.

We pray that Sister Christyn has found peace in her new life with her God.

This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information and the eulogy presented by Sister Ellen Lorenz, SSND