

In Loving Memory

Sister Ellen Lorenz



Birth
July 6, 1935

Baptism
July 21, 1935

Profession
July 17, 1957

Death
December 22, 2020

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

When we sit back and remember Sister Ellen, we think about Mount Mary College (now University), to which she gave her services for forty-three years. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel published a story about her that said, “She was known for being a humble leader who wanted her students and everyone around her to achieve their highest potential.”

It all began on July 6, 1935, in Berlin, Wisconsin, when she was born, the second daughter, to Genevieve Thomas and Frank Lorenz. The Lorenz Family made their living on the farm. Her parents were quite religious and she even had an uncle who was a Jesuit priest. She was baptized at St. Joseph Parish in Berlin on July 21, 1935. Her sister Jean was four years older. She and Jean were very close friends through the years and loved visits with her and her five children. Jean lived in Ohio and Louisiana, so every visit was special. She was also faithful to her parents through all the years. They even moved to Milwaukee to be closer to her.

When it was time for school, she attended the country school where she was one of two students in grade one. She had lots of time to learn more than the first-grade curriculum because she listened in on what the older students were being taught. Her family moved to town so from grade five through seven she went to Washington School. In the summer after seventh grade the family moved again, this time to Appleton, Wisconsin, where she attended eighth grade at St. Therese School. She made lots of good friends. After graduation, she learned that some of her friends were planning to attend St. Mary High School in Menasha, Wisconsin, and she believed that would be the best place for her to go to high school, so she convinced her parents to let her do that. It was at St. Mary’s that she first came to know the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Ellen had known about sisters very early in life and had dreamed of founding her own order to minister to the Siberians. She even designed their habit. But now when she was old enough to be serious about a religious vocation, the thought was quite vague and needed stirring up.

Her high school years really expanded her potential academically and socially. She was a class officer for two years, she was in the class play and she worked on the year book committee for four years. She was known as, “...the nicest girl you could meet. Intelligent, lots of fun, and very sweet.”

Following high school, she went on to Mount Mary College (now University), majoring in English. The following summer she got a job up in Door County, Wisconsin, as a waitress. She enjoyed the comradery with the workers and she had some quiet breaks when she found herself imaging her future. It was then that the Spirit suggested religious life to her more strongly and she decided not to put it off too much longer. She returned to Mount Mary to finish her sophomore year and then made plans to prepare for her life commitment which began when she entered the candidature in 1955. The next three years she focused on her religious formation and finishing her college requirements.

By 1958, she began teaching English at the Academy of Our Lady in Chicago. In six years, the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) leadership suggested

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that she begin studies for a M.A. and for her PhD. She loved being a high school teacher and she did not see herself as moving on to administration, which she knew would happen if she got a Doctorate. But she listened to her call and spent three years of study at Loyola University in Chicago and then at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois.

In 1968, she was back to teaching, this time at her Alma Mater, Mount Mary. After seven years, she served as Academic Dean for four years. During this time, she saw the need to create a required study for all students which would lay a foundation not only for their studies, but for their life time: "Search for Meaning," a philosophy and theology course which is in place yet today. It was inspired by the book, "Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl. Then in 1979, she was called on to be the sixth president of Mount Mary.

Being president was not her goal, but became a clear call from the college community. Knowing her success as an inspired teacher, the leadership wanted the kind of leadership they could obtain from her. Ellen was motivated by her core and, "the joy of seeing her students develop their values and skills and go on to inspire countless other young people through their teaching." She had worked in the education department teaching students how to be most effective with young learners. Now as president, she was in a position to give solid leadership to the many details of the college functions. One of her students who now is a chair in the education department says she remembers Ellen for her humility, but also for her sharp intellect and passion for finding quick but thoughtful solutions to any problem. She did this for nine years and then returned to her love, teaching.

After Ellen's ministry was complete and she retired, she still noticed in little ways what she could do to help out, like tutoring students. She was never centered on herself, but on how she could reach out and make the world a better place in very unnoticeable ways. She was even still up to giving a presentation to the board of trustees on zoom just one month before she died.

Ellen looked back over time in her autobiography and she was so grateful to her community of sisters she had lived with through the years. Everything that was even just routine meant a lot to her. But first, she followed the will of God. When asked by a friend if she was ready to die, she said, "I am ready; whatever God wants, I want."

Sister's celebration of life was January 14th with burial in the Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin, cemetery.

By Sister Elise Zettle, SSND

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