



In Loving Memory

Sister Esther Smith

Sister Esther Smith, 98, died Sunday, March 11, 2018, at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. She was the fourth of 10 children born to Stanley and Frances (Kupczak) Smith of Milwaukee.

Esther's parents, committed to raising their children in the Catholic faith, enrolled Esther at St. Casimir School, where she remained through eighth grade. She thought highly of her teachers at St. Casimir, remarking in her autobiography, "I admired the sisters who taught me. They were models of womanhood and examples of genuine religion. Their spirit of sacrifice and devotion was outstanding."

As a child, Esther enjoyed watching magicians, reading fairy tales and myths and singing. She participated in many school programs, the most memorable being "Cinderella," where she portrayed one of the stepsisters. Esther had many friends throughout her school life, and she learned early in life how dear friendships can be.

After finishing the eighth grade, Esther attended Riverside High School in Milwaukee. Studying was a serious matter for Esther. Her favorite subject was English grammar, but she also enjoyed shorthand and typing. Despite her devotion to her studies, Esther made time for other activities. She was a cheerleader during high school football games and enjoyed swimming, baseball, basketball, golf, volleyball, roller skating and ice skating.

Many influences pointed Esther toward a religious life. Her oldest sister, Dorothy (Sister Mary Stanislaus Smith), entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame when Esther was 12 years old. Besides coming in contact with SSNDs at St. Casimir, Esther occasionally worked at the convent laundry after school. However, it was at Holy Communion one day during her high school years that Esther received her calling. She described in her autobiography, "One day after returning to my pew after Holy Communion, a certain happy feeling came over me, as though our dear Lord was asking me if I would like to be a nun." Because of the demands of her large family, however, Esther delayed entering the religious life. After completing high school, she worked for a year to help support her family.

Although Esther's year after high school was very active, she felt something was missing from her life. She wrote, "The sacred thought of the religious life engrossed me completely." During this time, her mother's health declined, and Esther was required to help care for her. She was afraid this would prevent her from becoming an SSND. She reflects, "I felt that God was calling me for the last time, and if I did not respond, I never would." Thanks to her sister Dorothy's persuasion and her twin sisters' ability to help take care of her mother, Esther was allowed to enter the SSND candidature in September 1939.

Esther shared in her autobiography, "Inexpressible were the happy moments of the day of my candidature and more so were the joyful hours spent as a postulant on mission in Blue Island, Illinois, working my way toward

Birth
July 17, 1920

Baptism
July 25, 1920

Profession
July 23, 1942

Death
March 11, 2018

Burial
Notre Dame of Elm Grove
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

continued

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reception.” Esther professed her final vows on July 23, 1942, and became Sister Francis Joseph.

After her final vows, Sister Francis Joseph was assigned to teach middle school students at St. Mary’s in Kickapoo, Illinois. During the summer of 1943, she spent time at St. Patrick’s Convent in Peoria, Illinois, recuperating from an illness. It was during this time that she experienced a tornado. She reflects in her autobiography, “Living through a tornado was an experience I shall never forget. Since a window could not be shut, I knelt before it with a carpet against the screen. I thought at any moment it would be the last for me. Numberless Acts of Contrition came forth from my soul.”

Beginning in August 1943, Sister Francis Joseph taught in Wisconsin, beginning at Holy Name in Sheboygan. After one year at Holy Name, she spent the next 10 years teaching middle school at Holy Angels in West Bend. She was transferred to SS. Peter & Paul in Huntington, Indiana, where she taught middle school from 1954 to 1958. She then returned to Wisconsin where she taught middle school at Christ the King in Wauwatosa until 1962. From 1962 to 1963, she taught junior high students at Holy Assumption in West Allis. Starting in 1963, Sister Francis Joseph spent the next six years at St. Anthony in Milwaukee, five years as a junior high teacher and one year as principal and junior high teacher. She received a bachelor’s degree in English from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1961.

After spending one year teaching junior high at St. Mary in Menasha, Wisconsin, Sister Francis Joseph returned to her home parish school of St. Casimir, Milwaukee, in 1970. She served as a junior high teacher there for nine years, then became principal in 1979. She remained in that position until 1981.

Sister Francis Joseph took a leave of absence from 1981 until 1984. During the winter of 1983, she and her sister, Dorothy, were involved in a serious car accident with a snowplow. It took several months for Sister Francis Joseph to recover. After her recovery, she again served as principal at St. Casimir until June 1987. She served as a secretary to a school counselor at SS. Peter & Paul through the SET Ministry of the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters from 1987 to 1991. By this time, she had reverted back to her birth name, Esther.

After spending several years in Waterloo, Illinois, Sister Esther returned to Milwaukee in 1997, where she ministered full-time at the Sisters Interacting with Sisters apartment complex. In 2007, she retired to Notre Dame of Elm Grove.

Faith and spirituality meant a great deal to Sister Esther. She reflects in her autobiography, “My goal in life is to be the wholistic person God wishes me to become. For me, spirituality means experiencing inner peace in the midst of conflict, failure, etc. I imagine God as portrayed in my loving parents and family, in the goodness of people I meet and in accepting events as they happen through the eye of faith.”

A Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Esther was held on Thursday, March 15, at Notre Dame of Elm Grove chapel preceded by a visitation and prayer service. Burial was at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin.

*This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information
and the eulogy written by Sister Judy Fleisner, SSND*

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