

In Loving Memory

Sister Irene (Leon Marie) Feltz



Birth
August 3, 1927

Baptism
August 14, 1927

Profession
July 15, 1951

Death
December 15, 2018

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

Sister Irene Feltz (formerly Leon Marie), 91, died Saturday, December 15, 2018, in Notre Dame Health Care, Mankato, Minnesota. The tenth child of eleven, Sister Irene was born August 3, 1927, in Winona, Minnesota. She was baptized at St. Stanislaus Church on August 14, and given the name Irene Augusta. Her father, Leon, known as Larry, was born in Poland. Her mother, Mary, was born to Polish immigrants.

In 1933, Irene began first grade at St. Stanislaus School, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. During that year, her mother died. Irene later wrote, “I don’t remember my mother, but I do remember the love and care of my six older brothers and sisters for the four of us who were still in grade school and for Dorothy, who was too young to be in school.” After her eighth grade graduation in 1941, Irene attended Cathedral High School in Winona, Minnesota. She wrote, “Here I met the Rochester Franciscans and continued my studies under them at the College of St. Teresa.”

Describing her vocation, Sister Irene wrote, “I think I always knew from my earliest educational years that I would be a sister, but ‘not yet.’ When I am asked why I chose to enter the Notre Dames I have to answer that I do not know – that I loved my Franciscan teachers. The choice has always been a mystery to me. . . In my senior year at St. Teresa, I knew it was time to make a decision. Before the annual Holy Week retreat, I spoke to Sister Florine Neuman at St. Stanislaus Convent about entering the SSND.” Her father, brothers and sisters “accepted” her decision. She entered the SSND candidature in Mankato in August 1949.

Because she had completed her college education with majors in Latin and English, Irene spent her year in the candidature teaching Latin at Good Counsel Academy. At her reception into the novitiate in 1950, she was given the name Sister Leon Marie, a combination of her parents’ names. She later returned to her baptismal name. She professed first vows in 1951, and was missioned to St. Michael High School in St. Michael, Minnesota. Here, she and Sister Mary Mark Tacheny taught all subjects in the two-year high school, which was located in the grade school building. The high school building was ready for the 1953-54 school year, and she was able to teach “happy students in a beautiful new building with lovely classrooms and a complete faculty” for one year.

For the next thirty years, Sister Irene taught various subjects, but mainly Latin and Spanish, in Catholic high schools: St. Agnes, St. Paul, Minnesota (1954-66); St. Michael, St. Michael, Minnesota (1966-68); Trinity, Dickinson, North Dakota (1968-78); Loyola, Mankato, Minnesota (1978-79); St. Agnes, St. Paul, Minnesota (1979-81); and Cretin, St. Paul, Minnesota (1981-83). During her years of teaching, Sister Irene earned two masters’ degrees, one in education from the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota (1953), and the other in English and Spanish from the University of Notre Dame (1966). She also spent two summers studying Spanish conversation, one in Monterrey, Mexico, and the other in Barcelona, Spain.

In 1983, while teaching at Cretin, she felt the call to continue the ministry of her

continued

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Sister Irene Feltz



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friend, Sister Trinitas Keltgen, a Guatemalan missionary who had become ill. Sister Irene wrote, "My life was changed. I was still a teacher – but in Patzun, Guatemala. Those four years were a wonderful experience. I still taught, with typing as one subject, but my main subject was English. I especially enjoyed English conversations with the students outside of the classroom." After four years, she needed to decide whether to continue in Patzun and participated in an SSND renewal experience in Chatawa, Mississippi. Sensing that SSND service in Guatemala was turning more toward pastoral ministry, she decided not to return to Patzun, but would "do whatever the province asked of me."

Spending the fall of 1987 at Our Lady of Good Counsel, she received an invitation to give service at the SSND Generalate in Rome. Sister Irene lived and worked in Rome from 1988 through 1992. She commented, "I served as refectory and general helper. The friendliness of the sisters, no matter from where they were or what language they spoke or what position they held, was a wonderful experience." She attended a private group papal audience with Pope John Paul II and greeted him with the Polish, "Praised be Jesus Christ," a phrase from her childhood, and he responded with a smile.

Returning to the U.S. in 1992, Sister Irene thought about becoming an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. However, after a few months of helping out in various areas at Our Lady of Good Counsel, she was appointed archivist for the province, a position she held until 2006. During her years as archivist, each province was asked to write a complete province history. Sister Irene was given this task, and she produced a fully researched document that was divided into segments based on the time frame of each provincial leader. Sister Irene wrote, "Learning and keeping the history of the congregation and province and, I must admit, visiting and learning about other provinces were more great experiences."

Sister Irene's "retirement" years were spent in various capacities. She accompanied Sister Sue Von Bank, who was working with Dr. Snowdon on the Nun Study during the 2006-07 year. She taught English in Hungary during the 2010-11 year. In between, she volunteered in the archives, providing invaluable assistance. She also served as a receptionist and took an active part in liturgical services. Reading, knitting and other needlework projects occupied any spare time that she might have had.

The funeral liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held December 20 in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel. A prayer service of remembrance preceded the funeral liturgy. Burial of her cremains will follow in the Good Counsel cemetery at a later date. She is survived by her sister Dorothy Manhart, 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 Leon and Mary (Skorlinski) Feltz; sisters Modesta (Maud) Kiesling, Helen Grulkowski, Esther Fehrman and Marion Wamhoff; and her brothers Edmund, Henry, Joseph, Albert and Leon.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND