



In Loving Memory

Sister Joan Kettler

Sister Joan (formerly M. Francis Regis) Kettler, 94, died on Monday, September 17, 2018, at Notre Dame Health Care, Mankato, Minnesota. She was the oldest of eight children born to Francis and Emma (Opitz) Kettler of Eden, South Dakota. She was baptized on April 20, 1924, at Sacred Heart Church in Eden and was given the name Joanna Theresa.

She described her father as “a strong character and a very quiet man, loveable through his silence,” upon whose lap the children would climb as soon as he sat down. Joan pictured her mother as “the humble, home-loving wife and mother who gave her all amidst trials, afflictions, joys and sorrows.”

Birth
April 19, 1924

Baptism
April 20, 1924

Profession
July 22, 1944

Death
September 17, 2018

Burial
Our Lady of Good Counsel
Cemetery

Sacred Heart Parish had opened a school in 1920, conducted by SSNDs. However, it was forced to close in 1932 for financial reasons when Joan was in the early grades. Because of this, she attended a one-room country school to complete her elementary education. In 1936, when Joan was 12, her father was killed in an automobile accident. This was very hard on the family, and as the oldest, Joan did what she could to help. When Joan graduated from eighth grade, her mother wanted her to have a Catholic education. Joan wrote, “From my earliest years, it seemed an instinctive desire that I would one day be a sister like those to whom we used to carry cream, butter, and eggs, even before I was 5 years old. The sisters used to reward us with a holy card. Those were real treasures!” Through the influence of her aunts, Sisters Irmina Opitz and Marcilla and Agreda Kettler, who were SSNDs, she entered the aspiranture at Good Counsel in Mankato, Minnesota, in 1937. She graduated from Good Counsel Academy in 1941, and joined the candidature in August. As a second-year candidate in 1942-43, she taught first and second grade at Mater Dolorosa School in Madelia, Minnesota.

At her reception into the novitiate in 1943, Joan was given her father’s name, Francis Regis. She later returned to her baptismal name. She pronounced first vows on July 22, 1944, and then was missioned to SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato, Minnesota, where she taught first grade until 1951. In addition to teaching, she was the assistant sacristan, a responsibility that she truly enjoyed. Sister Joan was a life-long educator, whose teaching ministry included Rosary School, Northfield, Minnesota (1951-53); SS. Peter & Paul, Blue Earth, Minnesota (1953-1963); St. Anne, Bismarck, North Dakota, where she was also principal (1963-65); St. Mathias, Wanda, Minnesota (1965-66); St. Mary, Shakopee, Minnesota (1966-69); Silver Lake, Minnesota, Catholic, where she was also principal (1969-76); St. Agnes, St. Paul (1976-81); St. Wenceslaus, New Prague, Minnesota (1981-87); Lonsdale-New Market-Veseli, Minnesota, Catholic School (1987-91); and St. Bernard, Cologne, Minnesota (1991-97). She taught the gamut of grade ranges from primary through junior high. During her teaching years she earned a bachelor’s degree in education and history from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1955, and a master’s degree in education from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1963. In her 2014 Jubilee reflection, she wrote about her life as an educator, “For over 50 years I taught elementary children – all blessings from our God, some more or less challenging, yet precious beings. I am grateful that year after year I could welcome a new class, serving them and serving God through them.”

*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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After 53 years of teaching, Sister Joan retired. In 1997, she became a parish visitor at Holy Childhood Parish in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was introduced to the parish by the pastor in the October 12 bulletin: “So far Sister Joan has made a smooth transition to working with the elderly and shut-ins in their homes, care centers and hospitals. I’m sure her soothing voice, ready smile and gentle manner won them over instantly. She enjoys the friendliness of all our Holy Childhood folks, young and old. Her favorite hobby is crocheting, especially afghans. She also recycles greeting cards in artistic ways. So save your Christmas and other cards for her. Welcome, Sister Joan! We’re happy to have you aboard! You’ll love it here. Hope you stay for a very long time.” She did stay a long time – until 2008, when she moved to Our Lady of Good Counsel.

At Our Lady of Good Counsel, she continued her connection to education by serving as learning center librarian along with Sister Thelma Vetsch. She participated fully in campus activities and after moving to Notre Dame Health Care, was a regular attendee at the weekly Scripture sharing sessions. A prayerful woman she was often found in the chapel several times a day. She was an avid card player who also had a sweet tooth that was satisfied with candy and cookies. She considered her participation in the Rome renewal program as a highlight of her life.

Sister Joan concluded her Jubilee reflection with these words: “I have greatly appreciated being part of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, living in community wherever I was sent to serve, receiving and giving love and respect. All these aspects of our lives have drawn me closer to God.”

The funeral liturgy, with her cousin, Bishop Donald Kettler of St. Cloud, Minnesota, as presider, was held Monday, September 24, at Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel. A prayer service of remembrance preceded the funeral liturgy. Burial of her cremains followed at Our Lady of Good Counsel cemetery. She is survived by a brother-in-law Jim Anderson, 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 Francis Regis and Emma (Opitz) Kettler, her sisters Germaine Patterson, Marita Kettler and Emilyne Anderson, and her brothers, Frank and James. Her twin brothers Peter and Paul, died at birth.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND

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