



In Loving Memory

Sister Joesetta Marie Spencer

Sister Joesetta Marie Spencer, 81, died on November 6, 2020, in Notre Dame Health Care, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. She had entered Hospice the previous week, and sisters were keeping vigil with her.

Sister Joesetta was born in St. Louis, on the feast of the Nativity of Mary, September 8, 1939, and named Mary Anne. Her sister, Barbara, was born 13 months later, and her brother, Robert, nine years later. In 1944, Mary Anne began kindergarten at St. Barbara School, where she was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). During her first two years of school, she experienced long periods of absence because of rheumatic fever. She later wrote, "Because I had been so 'tied down,' as I termed it, nothing could restrain my limitless energy to which I gave vent in studies, music and sports during the remaining years of grade school." These years were spent at St. Philip Neri School, a transfer necessitated by a family move. Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet were her teachers at St. Philip, and she commented, "I loved the sisters so much. When I was in the upper grades, I used to help one of my favorite teachers after school hours. She knew I wanted to go to a Catholic high school, and she knew that my parents could not afford to send me." An arrangement was worked out so that Mary Anne could help care for children before and after school at St. Joseph's Institute for the Deaf in University City, while she attended St. Joseph Academy. During her years at both St. Philip Neri and at St. Joseph Academy, her ambition was to become a Sister of St. Joseph and work with children experiencing mental health disabilities or those with a hearing impairment.

Birth
September 8, 1939

Baptism
October 1, 1939

Profession
July 30, 1959

Death
November 6, 2020

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

However, at some point following her sophomore year, Mary Anne decided that her call was to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and in 1955, she entered the former St. Louis Province SSND aspiranture in south St. Louis. She completed her high school coursework in January 1957, and along with four others, immediately entered as an SSND postulate. She was received into the novitiate in July 1958, and given the name Sister Joesetta Marie. Following profession of first vows in 1959, she remained at Sancta Maria in Ripa, working toward a B.A. degree in education from former Notre Dame College. Her first mission experience was at San José Parish in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she spent the 1960-61 school year teaching fourth grade and directing parish and school music programs. In 1961, she fulfilled one of her early goals when she began teaching at St. Mary's Special School in St. Louis. She taught academic subjects and music and was a group mother for children with developmental disabilities. She summed up her time there by saying, "I spent 10 wonderful years there from 1961 to 1971." In 1968, she earned an M.A. in special education from St. Louis University.

Sister Joesetta spent the 1971-72 school year at St. John's School in Burlington, Iowa, as principal and teacher of eighth grade and music. From 1972-1975, she ministered at Tierra del Sol in Sunland, California, as a teacher and administrator for TES, a program for adults with developmental disabilities. In 1975, she moved to All Souls Parish in Overland, Missouri, where she served as principal until 1985. In the summer of 1985, she began coursework for an

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M.A. in theology at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota. She lived with sisters at St. Andrew Convent in St. Paul, and became acquainted with sisters of the former Mankato SSND Province. While completing her coursework during summer sessions, during the school year she served as Director of Religious Education for Our Lady of Loretto Parish in Spanish Lake, Missouri, and the neighboring St. Aloysius Parish until 1989. At that time, she completed her M.A. degree and earned a graduate certificate in pastoral ministry. From 1989-1993, she was a member of the ongoing formation team for the former St. Louis Province.

In 1993, Sister Josetta moved to St. Paul, and ministered as the coordinator of catechesis for the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis Catholic Education and Formation Department until 1999. She formed community in West St. Paul with Sister Lynette Friesen, whom she had met some years previously during their Rome renewal jubilee experience. Sister Josetta earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, in 1998. In 1999, she became a pastoral associate at St. Luke's Parish (now St. Thomas More) in St. Paul, and an adjunct faculty member at the St. Paul Seminary, School of Divinity. Additionally, she directed the Pastoral Ministry and Catechetical Ministry Certificate Program at the College of St. Catherine (now St. Catherine University), St. Paul, and taught a weekend college course in theology. In 2001, she was given the Mary Mulheron Pastoral Ministry Award through the Association of Pastoral Ministers of the Archdiocese and the College of St. Catherine for bringing, "competence, compassion, creativity and credibility," to the pastoral ministry profession.

Having ministered within the former Mankato Province boundaries for 10 years, Sister Josetta made the decision to request a transfer to the former Mankato Province in 2004. She used the word "transcribed" and explained, "While the word transcribed is not part of our current SSND vocabulary, for me it embraces my deep roots, which will always recognize the St. Louis Province as 'home.'"

During a time of cutbacks at the parish and college levels, in 2009, Sister Josetta left her positions at St. Thomas More and St. Catherine University. For two years, she tutored as part of the Eastside Learning Center staff. In 2014, she became a resident of Notre Dame Health Care in Mankato, where she shared her days with sisters and caregivers.

The Prayer of Remembrance and Funeral Liturgy for Sister Josetta Marie will be held at a later date. A private burial service was held November 12, 2020. She is survived by a sister, Barbara Sheeran, and a brother, Robert, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, Robert and Ruth (Burch) Spencer.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND