



## *In Loving Memory*

### Sister M. Leonida Speh

Sister Leonida Speh, 95, died on Monday, September 10, 2018, at Anna House, The Sarah Community, Bridgeton, Missouri. She was born in St. Louis and was the second oldest daughter of Leo and Ida (Bockius) Speh. On March 4, 1923, she was baptized at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in St. Louis and given the name Virginia Marie.

Virginia attended a public kindergarten and then attended Our Lady of Sorrows grade school where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. When she was older, she enrolled at Notre Dame High School. During her junior year retreat, Virginia experienced God calling her to religious life, but she did not share this with anyone. She received a scholarship to Webster College in St. Louis and attended for two years. During this time, she also worked as a telephone operator at Bell Telephone Company. Finally, she shared her desire to become a woman religious with her parents. They were surprised but happy and readily gave their consent. A younger sister, Ruth, would also enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Virginia entered the candidature at Sancta Maria in Ripa on August 26, 1942. She was received into the novitiate on July 27, 1943, and given the name Leonida, a combination of her parents' first names. Profession of first vows was on July 28, 1944, and final vows on July 28, 1950.

After profession, she taught elementary children at St. Engelbert's in St. Louis, for one year. During the following year, she was a student and completed her Bachelor of Science in biology and chemistry at St. Louis University in 1946. Later, in 1958, she would earn a Master of Science in education, secondary administration from Immaculate Heart of Mary College in Los Angeles.

From 1946-1954, she taught science in various high schools: St. Francis Borgia, Washington, Missouri; Academy of Notre Dame, Belleville, Illinois, and St. Anthony, Effingham, Illinois. For the next 15 years, she was missioned to the Aspiranture in Sunland, California. When the Aspiranture closed in 1969, she was transferred to Rosati-Kain High School, St. Louis, as assistant principal.

After seven years, she began a tenure of 25 years at Notre Dame High School, St. Louis. She also volunteered as a hair stylist, cutting hair and giving permanents to sisters at the motherhouse, Villa Gesu and later at The Sarah Community. In 2005, she was missioned to Veronica House and to Anna House in 2014.

During the summer months, she would join her sister, Sister Ruth (formerly, Sister Edward Paul), in her ministry with the Papago Indians in Arizona or working with the poor in Louisiana. This experience fostered a love for the poor and underprivileged. Later, Sisters Leonida and Ruth attended many Elderhostels together.

**Birth**  
February 26, 1923

**Baptism**  
March 4, 1923

**Profession**  
July 28, 1944

**Death**  
September 10, 2018

**Burial**  
Sancta Maria in Ripa  
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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*Sister Leonida Speh*



In 1988, she received a Certificate of Merit from the National Association of Biology Teachers. In 2001, she was one of eight people to receive an award at the National Catholic Educational Association convention at the Department of Secondary Schools convocation. This award recognized her commitment to Catholic education.

Sister Leonida was a wonderful influence and role model for many teachers and students during her 56 years as a teacher. Her enthusiasm and wealth of knowledge about biology and of life, as well as the time and energy she gave to students and projects, placed her above the average teacher. Her welcoming smile was a sign of her love and support of those she met. An active person, she often went swimming early in the morning to begin her day.

Throughout her life, a love of nature was an essential element in her spirituality. She loved the outdoors, especially gardening. She had a “green thumb” and delighted in planting and caring for flowers and plants. With her friend Carolyn Pryor, she visited many places at home and abroad and experienced firsthand the ecology of these areas, as well as their unique cultures. She found God in everything and everyone as she rejoiced in the beauty of God’s world and His creative power.

The wake/vigil was held at Anna House and Theresa Center on September 12, 2018. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated the following morning at Theresa Center with Rev. Ralph Parthie, OFM, presiding. Burial was in the Sancta Maria in Ripa cemetery. She is survived by her sister, Frances Lee of St. Louis. She was preceded in death by her parents and four sisters: Irma Costello, Marguerite Heil, Rosemary Ruby and Sister Ruth Speh, SSND. May Sister Leonida now rejoice in God the Creator who has welcomed her to the beauty of her eternal home.

*By Sister Carol Marie Wildt, SSND*

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