

In Loving Memory

Sister Lois (Mary Gilbert) Gilbert



Birth
October 5, 1929

Baptism
October 27, 1929

Profession
July 21, 1950

Death
August 11, 2017

Burial
Good Counsel
Cemetery
Mankato, Minnesota

*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 Lois (Mary Gilbert) Gilbert, 87, died in Notre Dame Health Care, Mankato, Minnesota, on August 11, 2017. Sister Lois had been in declining health these past years, and she entered hospice in early June.

The first of four children, Sister Lois was born October 5, 1929, in St. Andrew's Hospital, Minneapolis. Approximately three weeks later, she was baptized Lois Helen at Notre Dame de Lourdes Church. Her brother Don and sister Carol joined the family several years later, and her brother Howie was born when she was in high school. Her father Elmer, a Swedish Baptist, was a streetcar motorman, and her mother, a French Catholic, was a homemaker.

In 1935, Lois entered first grade at St. Anthony School in Minneapolis, where she was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ). She attended St. Anthony until she graduated from high school in 1947. During her school years, Lois took lessons in knitting and stitchery at a neighborhood center. Lois' mother was a seamstress, and several other close relatives did handwork and tailoring. Lois wrote, "There was always someone sewing, crocheting or knitting around our house."

Sister Lois recalled how she followed the call to be a School Sister of Notre Dame: "After high school, the CSJs invited me to visit with them (they even measured me for my postulant's habit), but my heart was not with them. A classmate, Dorothy Zelanek [the future Sister Andrea], lived across the street from me and we spent time together, including running errands for the School Sisters of Notre Dame at SS. Cyril and Methodius. Since my father was not Catholic and my mother favored the CSJs, my desire to become a sister was not easily accepted. The close proximity of the CSJs to our home, and my father's thinking that having a family should be the priority for me made it hard for me to go." However, she added, "Once my mind was made up, it could not be changed, and with the help of Our Lady, I entered the Candidature of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, August 28, 1947."

As a first-year candidate, Lois took college classes in preparation for becoming a teacher. As a second-year candidate, she taught primary grades at St. Matthew School, St. Paul. On July 20, 1949, Lois was received into the novitiate and given the name Sister Mary Gilbert, and with it the rare distinction of having identical religious and family names. (She later returned to her baptismal name.)

Following profession of first vows in 1950, Sister Lois began the first of her three ministries, that of teaching in elementary Catholic schools. Her first position was in the country at St. John the Baptist, Dayton, Minnesota, (1950-54), where she taught grades three and four and helped with music. In 1954, she was transferred to St. Agnes, a large city mission in St. Paul, where she taught grade six. Shortly after she began her second year at St. Agnes, she received a call from Mankato to immediately replace a sister at St. Clara

continued

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School, Clara City, Minnesota where she stayed until 1959. She also taught at St. Mary, Shakopee, Minnesota, (1959-62); Blessed Sacrament, Waterloo, Iowa (1962-64); St. Isidore, Litomysl (1964-65); St. Joseph the Worker, Mankato (1965-66); and Assumption-Notre Dame, Cresco, Iowa (1966-70). She earned a BA in history and english from St. Catherine's College in 1960.

In 1970, Sister Lois completed her MA in Guidance and Counseling from Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa, and started her second ministry as teacher and counselor in secondary schools. In this capacity she served at Good Counsel Academy, Mankato (1970-73 and 77-78); Columbus High School, Waterloo, Iowa (1973-74); Northeast Regional Catholic School, Minneapolis (1974-77); St. Agnes, St. Paul (1978-84); Regina High School, Minneapolis (1984-87); and Benilde-St. Margaret High School, St. Louis Park (1987-97).

During the 1997-98 year, Sister Lois enjoyed a sabbatical that focused on creative arts. She spent two months at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC, "working on crafts ... papermaking, basketry, writing, broom making, weaving and carving." She concluded her sabbatical time with a 60-day retreat at Kingstree, South Carolina, where "the program consisted of creation-centered and Native American spirituality; creative experiences in pottery, basketry, painting, and native crafts; wellness; and opportunities for trips to the ocean and other areas of natural beauty."

Sister Lois's sabbatical experiences gave birth to an idea that soon became her third ministry – sharing her creative talents through a Folk Art program. In the cover letter to her proposal, she wrote in January 1999: "So far I have had two careers: 24 years of teaching and 24 years as a high school guidance counselor. So now, I would like to start my third career of 24 (?) more years as a 'crafts person' sharing my talents with those less fortunate. A person who loves what they are doing tends to be happier, healthier and more productive." She was interested in helping women approaching their senior years "to experience satisfaction in using their talents to the fullest." Her idea reached fulfillment with the establishment of the SSND Folk Art Program in the former rectory of Guardian Angels Parish, Oakdale Minnesota, in the fall of 1999. Other sisters joined her and they reached out to the parish and to local and SSND communities in several ways. They produced craft items for the Good Counsel Craft Fair and other craft sales. Sister Lois also became very interested in the area Elder Friends Program, serving as co-director for three years. This program gave caregivers of elderly family members a weekly respite by welcoming elderly participants to Trinity Presbyterian Church in Woodbury every Thursday. She also taught crafts such as basketry and needlework in community education programs and commented, "In working with these various groups, I am aware of having brought contentment and joy to many people."

The Funeral Liturgy was held Monday, August 14, in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel. A Prayer Service of Remembrance was held Monday before the funeral. She is survived by her brothers, Don (Gayle) and Howard (Judy), nieces and nephews and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, Elmer and Beatrice (Martin) Gilbert, and her sister, Carol Dobbs.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND