

In Loving Memory

Sister Lucille (Leo Ann) Dehen



Birth
April 23, 1934

Baptism
May 13, 1934

Profession
July 21, 1954

Death
January 9, 2024

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 Lucille Dehen, 89, died at Benedictine Living Community – St. Gertrude’s, Shakopee, Minnesota, January 9, 2024. In her life as a School Sister of Notre Dame (SSND), she lived fully the statement from the SSND constitution, “We are educators in all that we are and do.”

Lucille Marie, the firstborn of Leo and Mildred Dehen, was born April 23, 1934, in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was baptized about three weeks later at St. John’s Church in St. Paul. Two more daughters and three sons completed the Dehen family. When Lucille was ready to begin second grade, the family transferred to Sacred Heart parish in St. Paul, and she attended Sacred Heart school where her teachers were SSND. In her autobiography, Sister Lucille wrote, “During my childhood my one ambition was to become a sister like Sister Aloise, Dad’s sister who was a Benedictine. I wanted to go to the Benedictine aspiranture after grade school, but the St. Paul Priory did not accept anyone until they were at least juniors in high school.” Her parents also insisted that she stay home until she was at least 16, so her first two years of high school were spent at North St. Paul High School. During those two years, Lucille changed her mind and decided to become a School Sister of Notre Dame. In 1950 she enrolled in the SSND aspiranture at Good Counsel Academy, Mankato, Minnesota and graduated in 1952.

Lucille entered the SSND candidature in August 1952. In November of that year, the candidates learned that instead of teaching during their second year as expected, they would instead become novices in July 1953. Just two months later, in January 1953, however, Lucille was asked to go to St. Francis de Sales School in St. Paul to teach second grade. The candidate who had been teaching the class had become ill and was no longer able to continue in the role, creating an immediate need for another teacher. Lucille left for St. Paul that day and was at work in the classroom the next, with help from Sister Mary Martin Tobias. In June, Lucille returned to Good Counsel to prepare for reception into the novitiate in July as had been originally planned. She was given the name Sister Leo Ann in honor of her father. She later returned to her baptismal name.

Following profession of first vows on July 21, 1954, Sister Leo Ann and her classmates were the first group to move into St. Albertus Hall in St. Paul, where they lived while studying at Diocesan Teachers College and later at St. Catherine’s College, also in St. Paul. In 1955, she began teaching grades one and two at St. Martin School, Rogers, Minnesota, where she stayed until 1960. A succession of primary grade teaching positions followed in Minnesota: St. Anne, Wabasso (1960-63); St. Felix, Wabasha (1963-68); St. Bartholomew, Wayzata (1968-69); then St. Wenceslaus, Dickinson, North Dakota (1969-70); and St. Andrew, St. Paul (1970-73). She completed her B.A. from St. Catherine’s College in 1963 and earned an M.A. in administration from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, in 1983.

In 1973, Sister Lucille moved to St. Bernard, Cologne, Minnesota as a first grade teacher. Early in 1974, the principal became incapacitated, and Sister Lucille was asked to step into the administration role. She remained at Cologne until 1977, when she returned to St. Andrew and taught primary grades until 1981. She then answered the call to serve in Washington state as principal at Trinity School in

continued

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Spokane (1981-84) and then at Guardian Angel-St. Boniface in Colton (1984-91). She had been a Right to Read director in Minnesota and continued as a teacher of reading, along with her administration duties, in both Washington schools. Sister Lucille left Washington in 1991 in order to be closer to her elderly mother. Sister Lucille accepted the principalship at St. John School in Meire Grove and St. Andrew School in Greenwald, two small towns in central Minnesota. In her application she stated that she liked working in rural areas and was aware of the difficulty in finding qualified staff.

Sister Lucille's strong interest in teaching reading fit in well with her next position – Director of the Good Counsel Learning Center, Mankato beginning in 1994. In addition to growing the clientele of the Learning Center, she coordinated the move of the center from Isidore Hall to St. Joseph Hall. She also implemented vision therapy testing, which could detect students who had eye issues. When she left this position in 2005, she commented, "Being director of the Learning Center has been the most rewarding job I have ever had. I have always loved teaching and being a principal, but this beats all that went before. It is so rewarding to see the joy of success on the faces of students."

Following a year's sabbatical, Sister Lucille tutored students at Fitzgerald Middle School in Mankato through the Foster Grandparent program. She also rejoined the Learning Center staff as a technology assistant. During the 2010-11 school year, she taught at St. Stephen School in Mako, Hungary. She and Sister Irene Feltz held English conversations with students, both individually and in small groups. Sister Lucille wrote, "Teaching English to students, sisters and parents in St. Stephen School was a privilege and honor. The blessings of that year will remain with me forever." When she returned from Hungary, she taught Learning Center students who were recent East African immigrants living in Mankato. She concluded her work in the Learning Center by serving as librarian until her retirement in 2020.

For many years between 1964 and 1982, Sister Lucille spent part of her summer at Bodawan Lodge, the SSND summer cabin on Potato Lake near Park Rapids, Minnesota. Her duties at the cabin were varied, ranging from helping cook to administrative work. She wrote, "I have had responsibilities all my life, but nothing as joyous as at Bodawan. It was a God-given gift. I loved the place, the beauty, the nature. It was so peaceful – pure peace. I loved the quiet, just to sit and look out over the water, over God's nature. Ben and Velda Johnson, the caretakers, were such beautiful people. They taught us so much of God's beauty. Their dedication to everything there was beautiful and inspiring."

Staying connected with her family was important to Sister Lucille, and she enjoyed visits with family members, especially in their homes.

The Funeral Mass for Sister Lucille was held March 11, in the Windermere Chapel, Shakopee, preceded by Visitation and Sharing of Memories. Burial in the Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato followed.

Sister Lucille is survived by her sister, Virginia "Ginger;" her brothers, Bob and Bill (Judy); 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, Leo and Mildred (Stark) Dehen, a sister, Carol Mahre, and a brother, John.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND