



In Loving Memory

Sister M. Ellene Gross

Sister M. Ellene Gross, 92, died Wednesday, February 28, 2018, at Notre Dame Health Care, Good Counsel Hill, Mankato, Minnesota. She was one of ten children and the oldest daughter born to Joseph and Christina (Schwartzemberger) Gross on the family farm southwest of Napoleon, North Dakota. She was baptized Mary Eva on December 14, 1925, at the Church of St. Anthony in Napoleon.

At the age of five, Eva, as she was called by her family, started country school with her brother, who was six. She transferred to another country school when she was in fifth grade. Following eighth-grade graduation, she decided not to go to high school and later commented, “Ma was very glad to have me at home being that I was the oldest of the girls.”

When she was six, Eva began attending religion classes, which were taught by Ursuline sisters for two months each year. Eva was impressed by the sisters and thought that she might become a sister. One day during a class session when Eva was twelve, the teacher asked who would like to become a sister. In her autobiography, Sister Ellene described what happened next: “Another girl said she would become a sister but that she was going to join the Notre Dame sisters. I didn’t mind at the time what order I would join. In my heart there was a whisper and a feeling that I would be happier if I would join the Notre Dame sisters although I had never even seen a Notre Dame sister before.” Eva’s religion teacher, an Ursuline sister, contacted the School Sisters of Notre Dame for her. Since Eva was only twelve, she was advised to wait at least one year, which she did and more. At the age of fourteen, she was invited by her pastor to join the Franciscan sisters and at fifteen, she could not decide whether or not to be a sister. In August 1942, when she was sixteen, she finally decided to become a sister and made arrangements to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame candidature in Mankato, later that month.

As a first-year candidate, Eva helped out in the motherhouse kitchen and as a second-year candidate, she was the home service sister at St. Paul, Comfrey, Minnesota. She was received into the novitiate in July 1944, and given the name Sister M. Ellene. Following profession of vows in 1945, she was missioned to St. Agnes, St. Paul as a home service sister. In 1947, the SSND home service sisters published a cookbook in honor of the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America. Sister Ellene provided three recipes: Potato Volcano, Welsh Rarebit Sauce (used in the Potato Volcano) and Rice Charlotte. From 1948 until 1955, Sister Ellene was the home service sister at Holy Family, Clarkston, Washington. Following one year in food service at the motherhouse, Sister Ellene served as homemaker for St. Michael Convent, St. Michael, Minnesota (1956-58). She spent the next three years at St. Joseph, Grenville, South Dakota, where, in addition to her convent responsibilities, she was the chief cook for the school’s hot lunch program.

With the exception of three years at Sacred Heart, St. Paul, Sister Ellene served in various capacities on Good Counsel Hill from 1961 through 1977. At different times, she worked in the boarders’ department, managed the academy kitchen, took care of the chaplain and guest dining rooms and was a nurse’s

continued

Birth
December 13, 1925

Baptism
December 14, 1925

Profession
July 22, 1945

Death
February 28, 2018

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

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aide in the health care center. As both a perfectionist and a practical person, she took pride in serving the resident priests and guests and wrote, "All my life I have tried to use common sense." She was known as an excellent baker, pies being her specialty. Sister Ellene was certified as a nursing assistant and attended several classes in cooking, dietary meal planning, cake decorating, hair cutting and first aid.

Sister Ellene became the home service sister for St. Matthew, St. Paul, in 1977. In 1985, she moved to her home state of North Dakota where she again provided a variety of services. She was a home health aide for an elderly resident in Bismarck from 1985 until 1993, when she returned to her hometown of Napoleon, to care for her father. Following his death in 1998, she continued to reside in Napoleon where she volunteered in parish ministry at St. Philip Neri Parish until 2005.

In 2005, Sister Ellene returned to Good Counsel Hill and resided in Marian Hall for one year, offering her services where needed until she moved to Notre Dame Health Care in the motherhouse. She maintained her sense of humor and participated as much as she was able in healthcare activities. The nursing staff enjoyed caring for her, appreciating her smile and the twinkle in her eye.

The funeral liturgy, with Father Joseph Fogal as presider, was held Wednesday, March 7, at 10:30 a.m. in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel followed by burial in Good Counsel Cemetery. A prayer service of remembrance preceded the funeral liturgy. She is survived by her sisters, Helen Schmidt, Eleanor Waelhof and Phyllis Babnick, and her brother, Adam, 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 and her brothers, Joseph, Andrew, Alfred, Anton and Valentine.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND

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