



In Loving Memory

Sister M. Laura Schmitt

Sister M. Laura Schmitt, 97, died Monday, May 7, 2018, at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. She was the sixth of nine children born to Michael and Elizabeth (Lanners) Schmitt in St. Leo, Minnesota. She was baptized on May 15, 1921, at the Church of St. Leo, and named Esther Susanna.

She wrote about her early family life, “My early years passed happily under the guidance of my good parents who were ever watchful in caring for my soul, as well as for my body. Consequently, daily prayers were just as vital a part of the day as daily food.” In 1927, Esther started first grade at St. Leo School, with School Sisters of Notre Dame as her teachers.

At that time, because St. Leo School offered a ninth and tenth grade program, Esther continued her education there. In her autobiography, Sister Laura wrote, “Ever since I can remember, my one great desire has been to become a School Sister of Notre Dame.” She expanded on this desire in a reflection written for her 75th Jubilee in 2015, “The SSNDs in my grade school at St. Leo were what drew me to follow their footsteps. They were so gracious and helpful. Entering the convent seemed like the next logical step.” Her autobiography continued, “The first step in the realization of this desire was my entrance into the Aspiranture [at Good Counsel Academy],” which occurred in September 1935, when Esther was a junior.

Esther entered the SSND candidature in August 1937, and spent the year as a college student. As a second year candidate, she student taught at Mater Dolorosa School in Madelia, Minnesota. She was received into the novitiate in 1939 and given the name Sister Mary Laura. She found the novitiate to be a time where she developed “a love for and an understanding of the new life we are learning to live.” She professed first vows on July 22, 1940, and shortly after began her ministry of teaching.

With the exception of a mid-year transfer to Loyola High School, Mankato, Minnesota, to fill in for a sister who became ill, Sister Laura’s early teaching positions were in primary grades. She taught at St. Anthony, Lismore; St. Paul, Comfrey; St. Clara, Clara City; and St. Nicholas, New Market, all in Minnesota. In 1951, she moved to Holy Family, Clarkston, Washington, her last primary grade experience. Continuing in Washington, she taught junior high grades at Guardian Angel, Colton, and St. Mary, Chewelah. She concluded her junior high teaching at St. Agnes, St. Paul (1955-61).

She earned a bachelor’s degree in education from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1950, and a master’s degree in mathematics instruction from the University of Detroit in 1970.

From 1961 through 1989, Sister Laura taught high school students. Her specialty was math, and during her years as a math teacher, she taught at many Mankato Province high schools: St. Agnes (twice); Good Counsel Academy; Loyola High School; Trinity High School, Dickinson, North Dakota; St. Mary’s

continued

Birth
May 7, 1921

Baptism
May 15, 1921

Profession
July 22, 1940

Death
May 7, 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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High School, New England, North Dakota (where she was also principal); and finally, at Don Bosco High School, Gilbertville, Iowa, where she spent ten years. At Don Bosco, she was also the assistant principal and wore many hats in addition to teaching. She was responsible for student attendance, student achievement information (honor roll, graduation rank, etc.) and other administrative tasks. She was also in charge of the concession stand and served as audio-visual coordinator.

In 2010, Sister Laura participated in a “Hands” project by Mankato artist, Kay Helms. At that time, Sister Laura wrote, “I used my hands a lot as a primary and middle school teacher. After earning a master’s degree in math, I taught in high school, and that’s where I stayed – teaching algebra, geometry, calculus and trigonometry for 25 years. I explained math problems on the blackboard and corrected many papers with these hands.” Sister Laura also had the unique ability of writing mathematical equations on the blackboard behind her while facing her students.

Sister Laura transitioned from school to parish work in 1989, when she moved to SS. Peter & Paul Parish, Mankato. For six years, she was part of the parish staff and helped with hospitality at Notre Dame Pastoral Center, a parish ministry located in the former SS Peter & Paul convent. From 1997 through 2007, Sister Laura used her mathematical skills as the bookkeeper for the Good Counsel Learning Center and the motherhouse sisters. She was also an assistant in the finance office, working with government benefits. Sister Laura began a ministry of community service in 2007 and fully retired in 2011.

While working on Good Counsel Hill, Sister Laura was known for her love of plants. In her “Hands” essay, she wrote, “My office is filled with plants that line the windows on the south and east walls. People call me the ‘Plant Doctor.’ They bring in both healthy plants and plants that are almost dead. From ferns to plumbagos and everything in between, I try my best to care for the healthy ones and revive the sick ones. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn’t.” In her later years, she used a motorized cart to move around the Good Counsel halls and would often stop at the reception desk and share a single blossom in a small vase.

The funeral liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held May 11 at Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel followed by burial in Good Counsel Cemetery. A prayer service was held the evening before. Sister Laura is survived by her brothers, Wilfred (Gerry) and John, 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, Michael and Elizabeth (Lanners) Schmitt, her brothers, Arnold and Ted, and her sisters, Cecilia Schmitt, Susan Kockelman and Kate Jelen. Another brother, Alphonse, died at the age of three weeks.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND

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