

In Loving Memory

Sister Marie (M. Magdalen) Russell



Birth
December 10, 1935

Baptism
December 15, 1935

Profession
July 17, 1955

Death
September 6, 2023

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 Marie (M. Magdalen) Russell, 87, died at Benedictine Living Community, Shakopee, Minnesota, September 6, 2023. Sisters had been praying with her in the days leading up to her death.

On December 10, 1935, the Dollard and Lillian Russell family of Madelia, Minnesota, welcomed their sixth and last child, a daughter named Marie Kathleen. Marie was soon baptized at the family's parish church, Mater Dolorosa, Madelia. She remembered a carefree time on the family farm, not realizing the sacrifices that her parents were making and commented later, "I wasn't deprived or if I was, I didn't know it." The Catholic faith was important to the family. In addition to Sunday Mass, they prayed the family rosary during Lent and the month of May and attended various devotions at the parish church.

Marie described an initial experience at Mater Dolorosa School, Medelia, "When I started school, I became a first-grade dropout after a few months because we lived nine miles from town and had to walk down a long lane to wait for a bus. We were the first to be picked up in the morning and the last to get home in the afternoon. I was too frail to tolerate such a rigorous day, so my mother, a former country schoolteacher, taught me at home." The next year, her sister was old enough to drive to school so Marie was able to attend school in person. When she was ten, the family moved to a farm just one mile from town, making it easy for her to walk to and from school.

When Marie attended Mater Dolorosa School, high school grades were also taught, but after Marie's freshman year, the high school closed. She then attended Good Counsel Academy in Mankato, as a boarder and wrote, "I believe that attending the academy was providential. God's plan for me lay hidden in that place." Her first year at Good Counsel was marked with a tragedy – her father was killed in a car accident on an icy road. Marie appreciated how the sisters and chaplain helped her through her grief at that time. She also wrote that during her senior year, she "sensed without a doubt that God was inviting me to come and follow Him forever." This meant that she would need to give up traveling with her friends to George's Ballroom in New Ulm, Minnesota, where she "absolutely loved dancing. Giving that up really pulled at my heartstrings but praise the Lord, I made the hurdle."

Marie graduated from Good Counsel Academy, Mankato, Minnesota, in 1953 and entered the SSND candidature in August. She was received into the novitiate in 1954 and given the name Sister M. Magdalen; she later returned to her baptismal name. She professed first vows in 1955 and spent one year studying at Diocesan Teachers College in St. Paul. In 1956, she received her first teaching assignment, Blessed Sacrament School in Waterloo, Iowa. Her teaching ministry spanned the next 26 years and included these schools, all in Minnesota: St. John the Baptist, Searles; St. Agnes, St. Andrew, Holy Childhood and Corpus Christi, St. Paul; St. Michael, Prior Lake; Shakopee Area Catholic School; and SS. Peter & Paul, Loretto. She completed her bachelor's degree

continued

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in education from Mount Mary College (now University) in 1965. A family highlight during this time was the ordination of her brother, Jim, in 1960. In 1969, she visited him when he was a missionary in Peru, another high point.

While participating in a spiritual growth program in St. Cloud, Minnesota, she worked as a nursing assistant at St. Scholastica, the Benedictine sisters' retirement home, from 1982 through 1984. She thoroughly enjoyed this work and decided to pursue further education in health care. Following a year of study at the Pierre School of Practical Nursing in Pierre, South Dakota, she graduated as a licensed practical nurse in 1985 and was also licensed in the state of Minnesota. She worked one year at the Minneapolis Veterans Hospital, Minneapolis, and then moved to her hometown, Madelia, Minnesota, to care for her mother while also teaching part-time at St. Mary's School, Madelia. She considered the three years of caring for her mother to be "an extraordinary and special experience for which I am forever grateful." In a 1992 *Sisters Today* article, "Letting Go: A Difficult Detachment," she reflected on the pain she experienced when it became necessary for her mother to move to a nursing home.

In 1990, Sister Marie turned her attention to assisting her SSND family members, first at Our Lady of Good Counsel Health Care, Mankato, Minnesota, and then at Lourdes Health Care in Wilton, Connecticut. In 1999, she answered another call, this time from Bishop Paul Dudley who was retired in his hometown of Northfield, Minnesota. His two sisters and a brother needed extended nursing care in the family home. While connecting daily with the sisters in the Northfield convent, Sister Marie provided this care for two years. She returned to Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, in 2001 and worked in the SSND Health Care until 2006. The next four years were spent at Notre Dame Center in St. Paul, assisting with hospitality needs.

Sister Marie filled another need from 2010 through 2015, that of nurse companion at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, acting as another set of ears for sisters during medical appointments. She supplied items for the Good Counsel Craft Fair, a hobby she had enjoyed for several years. Her specialties were gift bottle bags and knitted caps. She enjoyed time with her family and looked forward to visits with family members.

The funeral Mass for Sister Marie was held September 11 in the Windermere chapel with her brother, Father Jim Russell, as president. Visitation and sharing of memories preceded the liturgy. Burial of her remains in the Our Lady of Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato, Minnesota, will follow at a later date.

She is survived by her brother, Father Jim; her sister-in-law, Dolores Russell, and 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, Dollard and Lillian (Ullrich) Russell; her sisters, Therese Lynard, Margaret Fling and Rosemary Russell; and her brother, Dick.

By Mary Kay Ash, SSND