

In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Alene Kuhn



Birth
August 15, 1925

Baptism
August 16, 1925

Profession
July 21, 1946

Death
September 7, 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

Less than one month after her 98th birthday, our beloved Sister Mary Alene Kuhn died at Benedictine Living Community, Shakopee, Minnesota, Wednesday, September 7, 2023. Sisters had been visiting and praying with her in the weeks leading up to her death.

Sister Mary Alene was born in Hague, North Dakota, the second youngest of 11. She was baptized Frances at St. Aloysius Church in Hague. Her parents, Daniel and Frances (Stroh) Kuhn were German immigrants from Russia, who came to the United States, before the Russian Revolution. In addition to operating a store in Hague, Daniel was a music teacher who counted Lawrence Welk as one of his pupils and the parish catechist who prepared his own children for the reception of their First Holy Communion.

Frances attended a small public school in Hague, and later in Napoleon, North Dakota, where the family moved in 1933. She wanted to be a sister from an early age, but when she was nine and her sister Lavina (later Sister Daniella) left for the aspiranture at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, she changed her mind. The family was sad as Lavina departed and Frances made up her mind to spare the family a similar sorrow. She wrote, "Like any child of nine, I was too young to realize that the joy of my mother and dad far surpassed their sorrow, the day a third daughter of theirs was answering Gods' call." After completing eighth grade in 1939, Frances also left for the aspiranture. Her mother feared that the separation of Frances from her younger sister would be too much, but her older sister, Sister Dora, was stationed at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, and this helped Frances overcome her loneliness.

In August 1943, Frances entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) candidature. As a second-year candidate, she taught second grade at SS. Peter & Paul School in Mankato. She was received into the novitiate in 1945 and given the name Sister Mary Alene in honor of her brother, Al. She professed first vows in 1946 and began a long ministry in Catholic schools in Minnesota, Iowa and North Dakota. Her first assignment was Holy Rosary in North Mankato, Minnesota, where "I spent five happy years learning what community life was all about and teaching grades three and four." In 1951, she moved to St. Francis de Sales in St. Paul and found special joy because the convent had its own chapel, something that Holy Rosary convent did not have. Following her final vows in 1952, Sister Mary Alene was transferred to St. Wenceslaus School, Dickinson, North Dakota. Sister Alene stayed with Sister Dora in New England, North Dakota, until it was time to go to Dickinson. She remained at St. Wenceslaus, Dickinson, North Dakota, until 1961. Sister Alene earned her bachelor's degree from St. Catherine's College, (now University), St. Paul, in 1956. In 1961, she was asked to work toward a master's degree in administration during summer sessions at St. Thomas College (now University), St. Paul, and graduated in 1966.

Sister Alene opened a new school, St. Peter in Forest Lake, Minnesota, in the

continued

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fall of 1961. For six years, she taught grades seven and eight and served as principal and convent local leader. In 1967, she experienced a significant change when she became a full-time principal at St. Matthew School in St. Paul, with over 800 students. This was her first experience with a large school and large convent community. Her four years at St. Matthew were followed by two years at St. Anthony, Lismore, Minnesota, and then four years at Notre Dame Junior-Senior High School in Cresco, Iowa. She taught grades seven and eight in both schools. Following four years in Cresco, she became the administrator and upper grade teacher at St. Casimir School in Wells, Minnesota, in 1977.

In 1979, responding to a desire for a more contemplative life, Sister Alene spent a year with the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration in Portsmouth, Ohio. She returned to the classroom in 1980 and taught upper grades at John Ireland School in St. Peter, Minnesota, for one year. From 1981 until 1985, she was on the staff of the Our Lady of Good Counsel Education Center, Mankato, Minnesota, where she “met hundreds of warm, friendly people.” She then taught one year at St. John Vianney in South St. Paul and three years at St. Mary, New England, North Dakota, where she also served as principal. In 1989, Sister Alene moved to Pocahontas, Iowa, where she was the administrator of Pocahontas Catholic School. In addition to her work in school, she visited the elderly of the area “and discovered that those beautiful people did more for us than we could ever hope to do for them.”

Sister Alene returned to Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, in 1993, in part to care for her sisters. She also contributed to life on the Hill in many ways including receptionist duties. She remarked, “Counting the blessings on this Hill is like trying to count the stars. I know I can never thank God enough in this life.” In 1998, Sister Alene became the co-coordinator with Joanne Ardolf Decker, of Sister Friends Program. This program encouraged meaningful friendships between sisters and residents, which proved to be mutually beneficial. When Sister Alene and Joanne retired in 2010, 62 sisters had been involved in the program. Sister Alene also participated in another form of outreach – crocheting prayer shawls for St. John’s parish. She would set a goal of completing a certain number of rows each day.

Whenever she was asked how she was, Sister Alene would respond, “I’m happy and grateful!” And now, after all these years of being led and held by God’s hand, may she experience full happiness in God’s presence.

The Funeral Mass for Sister Alene was held Friday, September 15, in the Windermere chapel, Shakopee, Minnesota, with Father Joe Fogal as president. Visitation and sharing of memories preceded the liturgy. Burial in the Our Lady of Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato followed.

We extend our sympathy to Sister Alene’s nieces and nephews and their families, her friends and former colleagues and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, Daniel and Frances (Stroh) Kuhn; three SSND sisters, Mary George (Catherine), M. Dora (Teresa) and M. Daniella (Lavina); sisters Magdalen Nolz, Sister Mary Ann Welder, OSB, Benita Mitzel and Lucille Richter Schaible; and brothers, Pius, Gabe and Al.

By Mary Kay Ash, SSND