



Birth
Sept. 7, 1921

Baptism
Oct. 9, 1921

Profession
Aug. 11, 1946

Death
April 4, 2016

Burial
Notre Dame of
Elm Grove Cemetery
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

*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

In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Briant Foley, SSND

Margaret Elizabeth was born in Kansasville, Wisconsin on Sept. 7, 1921, to an Irish father, Michael J. Foley and an English, Scotch, Welsh mother, Irene Hankinson. She was baptized a week later at St. Mary's Parish Church in Kansasville. Margaret was the second of seven children. The Foleys were farmers and her father's health was poor so as the oldest daughter she learned all the home tasks and did outdoor chores as well. The children attended the local red brick school house at the end of their farm. Life was not easy, according to Mary Briant's autobiography:

"My parents were farmers, sufficiently poor that a ten-cent bag of candy on a Sunday was a big treat for all seven of us children." And later she wrote: "... for those who were part of a large, busy family with acres of land for work and play, there is no need to explain the sheer joy and challenges of this life."

Margaret received her elementary education at public school because there was no parish school. When she reached eighth grade, her brother began traveling 10 miles to attend St. Mary's High School in Burlington, Wisconsin. At great hardship to themselves her parents sent all seven children to St. Mary's. Following high school graduation in 1939, Margaret was eager to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame but her parents opposed it and she believed God sided with them.

Instead, she attended County Normal School and worked at a variety of summer jobs: housework in a funeral parlor, chauffeur for a real estate agent, working on an assembly line in a war plant, and caring for neighborhood children. After graduation from Normal School, she taught in a rural school with eight grades all in one room and resolved that teaching was what she wanted but re-determined to teach as a sister.

Margaret entered the SSND candidature at the former Milwaukee motherhouse in 1943. She was received into the novitiate on Aug. 10, 1945 and given her religious name, Mary Briant. She professed first vows on Aug. 11, 1946. She received a bachelor's degree with a major in history and minors in English and social science at Mount Mary College, Milwaukee in 1950. She completed her master's degree in history with honors at De Paul University, Chicago in 1962. Her doctorate in history was earned at Loyola University, Chicago in 1968.

For most of her life, Mary Briant was doing what she loved to do: teach. She was an SSND educator in who she was and all she did, educating with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons. She was elected provincial of the Mequon Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1971 and served in that capacity for the next four years. These were years of transition in religious life, both in community and ministry.

One of Mary Briant's great services as provincial was enrolling the former Mequon province in the Jesuit-led renewal program directed by Father Tom Swift, S.J. and the formation of a six-sister renewal team to lead the province through renewal in the spirit of Vatican II. This was happening

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Mary Briant Foley



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**School Sisters
of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD
THROUGH EDUCATION

at the same time the SSND Congregation was following the mandate of Vatican II to return to the spirit of our foundress. It was a time of change in the church, the world and religious life.

Sister Mary Briant's ministry as an educator spanned 60 years. Initially, she taught elementary and junior high students. Her elementary schools in Wisconsin were: St. Michael, Milwaukee; St. George, Kenosha; Holy Cross, Milwaukee; and St. Gabriel, Prairie du Chien. Her final elementary school assignment was at St. Bernadette, Rockford, Illinois where she served as both teacher and principal. After she received her doctorate, she taught history at Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, 1966-1971 and 1975-2008. In addition to teaching, she was chair of the history department, served on the faculty senate and on numerous committees, always the educator in who she was and all she did.

It seems significant this woman of few words, in her autobiography of a little less than two pages, wrote two paragraphs on being sent to Rockford, Illinois as superior, principal and teacher. Arriving with two other sisters, they found a partially built school and three weeks later discovered that what they thought was an addition to the hospital was to be their convent. In the meantime the SSNDs in Belvidere provided hospitality for all three.

At the first faculty meeting, they also discovered that four of the five lay teachers who were on the faculty, were mothers who had been talked into trying a year in the classroom, not teachers. Assigning each to a grade was no problem since they didn't care where they would be assigned. Their two questions were: "Where can we go to smoke?" and "Do we just give this manual to the children?"

Mary Briant sums up this challenge as a special God moment in her life, one she obviously never forgot: "That did not sound very encouraging but was perhaps one of the greatest blessings God was about to bestow on me. I really learned to depend upon Him and not on myself. And my five years at St. Bernadette's did work out well."

With retirement in 2008, Sister Mary Briant moved to Notre Dame of Elm Grove and served as a tutor at Mount Mary until 2012. Her ministry of prayer and presence continued until her death on April 4, 2016 at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Wisconsin. She was 94. She is survived by her sister Nora Grow, nieces, nephews, many friends, former students and the SSND Community.

Sister Mary Briant you have been for us, a faithful follower of Jesus, dedicating your entire life as an SSND in making Christ visible by sharing your love, faith and hope, especially as an educator.

We are forever grateful and send you off with an Irish Blessing:

*May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face.
May the rain fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May you be held in the palm of God's hand.*

*This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information
and the eulogy presented by Sister Mary Jacqueline Buckley, SSND*