



In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Donald Miller

Sister Mary Donald Miller, SSND, 92, died Monday, October 14, 2019, in Notre Dame Health Care, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. Sister Mary Donald was born on February 8, 1927 in a St. Paul, Minnesota, hospital. Because she was two months premature, and there was no time to contact a priest, a nurse quickly baptized her. Given the name Patricia, she spent the first six weeks of life in an incubator. Several serious illnesses marked her early years; three bouts with pneumonia, whooping cough and tonsillitis threatened her life. She wrote, “But I thrived on my dear mother’s wonderful care, and soon I developed from a frail delicate being into a strong, robust child.”

Birth
February 8, 1927

Baptism
February 8, 1927

Profession
July 17, 1948

Death
October 14, 2019

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

In 1933, Patricia entered first grade in the neighborhood school, Randolph Heights. When she was nine, the family moved across town and she was able to attend St. Columba School for grades four through eight. She attended St. Agnes High School where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. During her high school years she worked at various locations, including factories, an office and a bakery, and took care of children several evenings a week. She also belonged to several parish, school and city athletic teams and clubs. She felt a strong attraction to religious life in high school, and entered the SSND candidature in 1945. She was received into the novitiate in July 1947, and given the name Sister Mary Donald, the name of one of her brothers.

Following profession of vows in 1948, her first teaching experience was at St. Matthew School, St. Paul, Minnesota (1948-49), where she taught 58 fourth graders, took three college classes on Saturdays and another class three times a week at Diocesan Teachers’ College (DTC), and counted the Sunday collection until well past noon on Sundays. The next year, she taught at St. Agnes in St. Paul, Minnesota, because it was closer to DTC. After finishing DTC in 1950, she taught for one year at St. Michael School, Madison, Minnesota. In 1951, she began a nine-year stint at St. Joseph, Red Wing, Minnesota. It was in Red Wing where she became interested in teaching of reading.

Sister Mary Donald next taught seventh graders at Holy Rosary School in North Mankato, Minnesota (1960-62), and then was principal and eighth grade teacher at St. Casimir School, Wells, Minnesota, until 1966. During her years of teaching, Sister Mary Donald earned a Bachelor of Science in education from Mount Mary College (now University), Milwaukee, in 1957 and an MA in reading from Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, in 1964. Noting Sister Mary Donald’s commitment to and success in elementary education, SSND leadership asked her to be a part of the Education Department of the Mankato Campus of Mount Mary College on Good Counsel Hill in 1966. In this capacity, she taught several education classes to postulants and young sisters, sharing her expertise in a variety of ways.

Due to the construction of a new building for Good Counsel Academy, a former residence hall at Good Counsel was vacated. Sisters were asked for ideas for the building. Sister Mary Donald had a suggestion: “I know what I would do. Start a reading center.” She convinced province leadership that she was serious and was told, “The building is yours.” She enlisted the help of her Cardinal

continued

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Stritch adviser, recruited sisters for various tasks, and opened the Good Counsel Reading Center in the summer of 1967. Over the past 52 years, the Good Counsel Reading Center has become the Good Counsel Learning Center, and has transitioned to serving both adult immigrants and others needing to learn English, as well as children with learning difficulties. Sister Mary Donald directed the Good Counsel Learning Center until 1975, and also served in initial SSND formation 1973-75.

In 1975, Sister Mary Donald became principal at St. Stanislaus School in Winona, Minnesota. She summarized her time there: “These eighteen years were full of surprises, challenges and growthful opportunities. After ten years, the Winona Catholic Schools went through a series of consolidated changes. I was asked to continue as superintendent/director of the consolidation and full-time principal of the middle school. These changes, brought about through pain and letting go from parishioners, teachers and students, developed into a thriving educational system.” What this summary leaves out, is the immense love and appreciation shown to Sister Mary Donald by the people of Winona. One of her favorite experiences was being selected Jack Frost in the 1991 Winona Winter Carnival. St. Mary’s University bestowed its highest honor on her, an honorary Doctor of Education degree, and she also received the Bishop’s Medal of Service. It was in Winona that she became known as the “Shoe Nun.” She learned that she could earn a commission for every pair of Mason shoes she sold, commissions that became a tuition fund for needy school families. For several years, she carried shoe catalogs with her at all times, encouraging those she met to purchase shoes for her cause.

In 1993, Sister Mary Donald brought her concern and love for students to the Mankato Area Catholic School System, serving as principal of Holy Rosary Intermediate and Fitzgerald Middle School, both of Mankato, Minnesota. She continued to draw out the best efforts from both staff and students and implemented programs to improve the educational atmosphere. One of her strong interests was that of a Peace School. Working with students, staff and parents to develop a set of guidelines, Sister Mary Donald promoted the culture of peace at Fitzgerald. In 2004, Sister Mary Donald “semi-retired” but stayed on the Mankato staff as a mentor to teachers and students.

Beginning in 2005 and almost until the day she died, Sister Mary Donald remained active in some capacity with the Good Counsel Learning Center. Her last efforts were to help some of the Good Counsel nursing assistants with their citizenship studies. Her commitment to education and community was recognized in 2008, when she received the Mankato YWCA Woman of Distinction award. Throughout her life, she maintained her attitude of gratitude. Her response to “How are you” was consistently, “I’m grateful.” She treasured her extended family and was grateful for any opportunity to be with them. She participated fully in Notre Dame Hall activities and community meetings, and was a member of the weekly sisters’ Spanish class. She reached out to others through phone calls and letters, still written in perfect penmanship.

The funeral liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held October 21, 2019, in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel. Visitation was held Sunday afternoon. She is survived by 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, Henry and Barbara (Smith) Miller, her sister, Marguerite Smith, and her brothers, Douglas, Fred, Tom and Don.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND