



In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Elsa Metternich

Born Florence Isabelle Metternich to Henry and Clara in Milwaukee Wisconsin, on December 3, 1915 she was the fourth of seven children; Clara, Henry, Norbert, Florence, Elizabeth, Virginia and Robert.

She attended St. Anthony's and St. Augustine Schools in Milwaukee, where she was taught by SSNDs. One of her earliest memories was at the age of three, her grandmother was dying and asked to see little Florence. Her grandmother gave her a blessing and prayed that God would let her become a sister. Sister Elsa said the desire continued to grow as she got older, and she entered the convent at the age of 13.

According to her autobiography, in grade 8, she began to have doubts about her vocation and wished her parents had said "no" when she had asked to go. But they gave her the freedom to choose, perhaps thinking she wouldn't stay since she liked to have fun and engage in sports. She was inspired though by pictures of missionary sisters on horseback gave her an interest in foreign missions. She professed First Vows on August 2, 1935.

Her desire for missionary work was fulfilled after teaching for 18 years in Michigan, when she was assigned to Holy Childhood Boarding School in Harbor Springs. Although she did like working with the Native American children, the desire for foreign missions still lingered in her heart.

In 1956, Sister Elsa was missioned to Guam. She taught in several schools on the island and became principal and superior at Mount Carmel, Agat. Typhoon Karen, in November of 1962, destroyed the church, school, convent and almost all of the village of Agat. With the help of the military things were cleaned up, rebuilt and classes continued.

She returned to the United States in 1966 to teach in Wisconsin. She taught and was the organist at St. Gabriel in Prairie Du Chien and Holy Name in Sheboygan.

She returned to Guam in 1971, she recalled in her autobiography that the highlight of that time was the fall of Vietnam in 1975 and her work with the Vietnam refugees.

After another devastating typhoon in 1976, Sister Elsa was asked to go to Yap. Besides teaching there, she visited the hospital and became interested in healthcare. In 1980, she returned to the U.S., and classes in clinical pastoral education to become a hospital chaplain. She was asked to come back to Yap to work with a school health program. After some training as a practical nurse, she joined a team that vaccinated and delivered health education to children on neighboring islands. This work meant many hours and days on a boat, which she recalled fondly in her biography. She then started began work in education, training, and supervising of the practical nurses at Yap Memorial Hospital.

Birth
December 3, 1915

Baptism
December 12, 1915

Profession
August 2, 1935

Death
August 4, 2017

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

continued

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Her next missionary call, at the age of 72, was to Ebeye, in the Marshall Islands. She left after a year due to vision problems.

Upon her return to the U.S., she continued in ministry through volunteering in nursing homes and other senior programs in Wisconsin and Arizona. While in retirement, Sister Elsa kept her interest in daily happenings, walked every day, and participated in most of the activities, even playing Bingo.

Sister Elsa died August 4, 2017 at age 101. She was preceded in death by her parents Henry and Clara Metternich, sisters Elizabeth and Claire and brothers Robert, Hank and Norbert. She is survived by her sister Virginia Hughes, and many nieces and nephews.

This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information and the eulogy written by Sister Ellen Jean Klein, SSND

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