



In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Ernest Gibson

Sister Mary Ernest Gibson, 96, died Tuesday, February 27, 2018, at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. She was one of five children born to Ernest and Rose (Rodenkirch) Gibson in Waucoma, Iowa. Her father was a truck driver and her mother, a homemaker. Upon her baptism on November 27, she was given the name Harriet Willamena.

When she was three years old, Harriet's parents decided to move from the small farm they operated, as they wanted their children to receive a Catholic education. However, living on the farm would make that impossible. After staying with her grandparents for a time, Harriet's family eventually settled in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.

Harriet began school at St. John's parish when she was six years old. Later, her family moved to the northern side of town, and Harriet attended St. Gabriel's where she had SSNDs as her teachers. At first, Harriet had a difficult time in school because she loved the outdoors and wanted to be outside instead of cooped up in class. However, her love for nature remained with her throughout her life, and she would try to spend as much time as she could outside.

She started thinking about the religious life after her graduation from the eighth grade. Her best friend and another classmate entered a religious order and pressured Harriet to do the same. Harriet refused and went on to attend St. Mary's Academy, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, for one year. She quit the academy because she really wanted to be a farmer and didn't see how studying subjects like Latin and English would help her work the soil and tend animals.

During Harriet's time at St. Mary's and her year out of school, she kept in touch with Sister Mary Catherine Suelzer, the superior at St. Gabriel's and an SSND. Sister Mary Catherine showed Harriet that she was being called to religious vocation. Harriet resisted her calling, wanting so much to be a farmer and to live in the country. She knew she wouldn't be able to do this if she chose the religious life. After much prayer and struggle, she decided to enter the SSND candidature in 1938. She said, "I felt God was calling, and couldn't refuse Him."

In 1941, Harriet made her first profession and became Mary Ernest. That same year, Sister Mary Ernest taught the primary grades at Sacred Heart in Marshfield, Wisconsin. As she began her ministry in teaching, Sister Mary Ernest found it difficult to apply the ideals instilled in the novitiate to the mission way of life. She experienced loneliness for the first time and missed the community of the motherhouse and the companionship of the sisters who lived there. She also found teaching a challenge, as she preferred working outdoors and in a domestic capacity. Even though she never felt perfectly at ease in the classroom, Sister Mary Ernest grew into her ministry, and she was able to perform her school duties satisfactorily.

Beginning in 1958, Sister Mary Ernest taught primary grades at Holy Redeemer in Madison, Wisconsin. Two years later, she taught at Holy Angels in Gary, Indiana. She returned to Wisconsin in 1962, teaching at St. Mary in Glen

continued

Birth
November 21, 1921

Baptism
November 27, 1921

Profession
July 17, 1941

Death
February 27, 2018

Burial
Notre Dame of Elm Grove
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

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Haven and the school she attended as a child, St. Gabriel in Prairie du Chien. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee in 1965.

In 1969, Sister Mary Ernest became a home maker for the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. She later served in food service at Notre Dame Health Center, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. Unfortunately, her mother became ill, and in 1972, Sister Mary Ernest returned to Prairie du Chien to care for her mother. While caring for her mother, she again taught at St. Gabriel.

Sister Mary Ernest wrote in her Jubilee profile, "Caring for my mother brought a strong desire to minister as a nurse's aide." As a result, she became an LPN and served as a nurse's aide at Elm Grove from 1984-1987 and at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Mount Carmel, Wisconsin, from 1987 until her retirement in 1998. Sister Mary Ernest was a calming, healing presence among the sisters who were ill and many appreciated her faithful ministry and care.

While serving the sisters at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Sister Mary Ernest was able to satisfy her passion for the outdoors. She was often found attending the flowers and garden early in the morning wearing a straw hat. She also tried her hand at making wine, working in the cellar just below the kitchen.

Sister Mary Ernest moved to Notre Dame of Elm Grove in 2008 where she served in prayer and presence. She made and repaired rosaries and knitted hats and mittens, which she often gave to her caregivers. Throughout her life, Sister Mary Ernest was quiet but sociable; she was a good listener and had little difficulty getting along with others. She enjoyed teasing her caregivers and never complained about any challenges she faced. Sister Mary Ernest was a model of faithful, steadfast love, living the joy of the gospel. She loved a life of quiet service and total dedication and was a wonderful, gentle presence.

A Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Mary Ernest was held on Monday, March 5. Burial was at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. Sister Mary Ernest was preceded in death by her parents and her brother, Ernest, Jr. She is survived by her sisters, Rosemary Schwingle, Sister Frances Therese Gibson, SSND, and Cecilia Nystrom.

*This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information
and the eulogy written by Sister Ann Arthur Klinker, SSND*