



In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Immaculate Hecker

Sister Mary Immaculate Hecker, 95, died peacefully at 10:22 p.m. on August 25, 2022, in Notre Dame Health Care, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. Sisters were praying with her until the time of her death.

On June 7, 1927, Eva Hecker, the 10th of 13 children, was born on a farm near Fairfield, North Dakota. Her father, Liberatus Hecker, came to America from his birthplace in Russia and lived near Dickinson, North Dakota, where he married her mother, Anna Marie Faller in 1911 and moved to their farm near Fairfield. Eva was baptized at Immaculate Conception Church in Fairfield on June 22, 1927.

When she was 6, Eva's school days began in a small country school. After eighth grade graduation, she attended a year of high school at St. Pius in Scheffield, North Dakota, where she boarded with the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). Hearing the sisters at prayer, she considered becoming one of them. After completing her high school education at St. Mary's in New England, North Dakota, she entered the SSND candidature in August 1945 to prepare for religious life. The next year, Eva taught first grade at Sacred Heart School in St. Paul, Minnesota. On July 16, 1947, she was received into the congregation and given the name Sister Mary Immaculate. She professed her final vows on July 17, 1948, and was sent to St. Matthew in St. Paul where she taught fourth grade and continued her education at Diocesan Teachers College (1948-1950). She then taught intermediate and upper grades at St. Pius, Scheffield (1950-1953); St. Wenceslaus, Dickinson (1953-1955); St. Matthew, St. Paul (1955-1960); St. Benedict, Strasburg, North Dakota (1960-1961) and St. Mary's, New Trier, Minnesota (1961-1966).

In 1961, Sister Mary graduated with a B.A. in Education from Viterbo College (now Viterbo University) in La Crosse, Wisconsin. She completed her teaching ministry at Don Bosco High School, Gilbertville, Iowa (1966-1967) and Emmons Central High School, Strasburg, North Dakota (1967-1971).

Sister Mary served as residence moderator at Good Counsel Academy in Mankato, (1971-1972), after which she moved to Winona, Minnesota, where she served in the guest and housekeeping departments at Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary, (1972-1974). In 1974, she attended Rochester Community College in Rochester, Minnesota graduating as a Registered Nurse with an associate degree in Arts in 1977. She was a nurse and/or nurse supervisor at Regina Memorial Hospital in Hastings, Minnesota, (1977-1979 and 1980-1983) and St. Joseph Health Care at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Mankato, (1979-1980).

In 1983, Sister Mary joined a small group of sisters in Appalachia. In her own words, "I felt God leading and embarked on a journey." This journey of 29 years began when she accepted a nursing position at Buchanan General Hospital in Grundy, Virginia, (1983-2000), but community outreach took on increasing significance as she served in the far western counties of Virginia.

continued

Birth
June 7, 1927

Baptism
June 22, 1927

Profession
July 17, 1948

Death
August 25, 2022

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

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*Sister Mary Immaculate
Hecker*



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of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

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In 1989, Sister Mary initiated Women Empowering Women, an organization that offered the services needed to improve women's lives, particularly those of low-income groups in remote areas where isolation, lack of opportunities and support hamper wholesome development and effective living.

Ten years after her arrival in Appalachia, Sister Mary wrote: "My life is a multi-focused ministry, which has decreased in direct service and increased in efforts toward systemic change. Participation in an emergency food bank, listening to and encouraging individuals, especially women, and driving in the field to assess housing repair needs of applicants for that service are my chief direct-service activities. It has been very rewarding to see the effects – like persons who have been assisted with housing in turn volunteering to help others or women who felt trapped in their homes move on toward college or GED education and make positive changes in their lives. Other activities I have 'fallen into' chiefly by invitation include membership on the board of directors for a shelter for abused women, membership on the Buchanan County Client-Centered Advisory Council – a sort of local legal-aid voice for the poor and CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) that helps children caught in the court system because of abuse or neglect."

Sister Mary was also a board member of the Family Crisis Support Services, of Hope House, a shelter for abused women in the area and of Buchanan Neighbors United, which hosted volunteer groups for home repair. She volunteered at the Buchanan Country Domestic Violence Shelter and was a member of the Grundy Women's Club.

After retiring from nursing in 2000, Sister Mary dedicated herself completely to reaching out to the people she met, first in Mavisdale, Virginia, (2000-2001) and then in Hurley, Virginia, (2002-2012). During a disastrous flood in 2002, Sister Mary helped provide emergency family care. She was instrumental in bringing a medical clinic to Hurley. The Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce awarded her with their annual volunteer award in 2006.

Sister Mary returned to Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, in 2012, and continued her ministry through prayer. The gracious, kind and positive manner that enabled her ministry also characterized her participation in SSND community life. She was close to her large family and loved to visit. Throughout her life, Sister Mary "walked in God's love" as she journeyed near and far but always toward her eternal homeland where she would unite with God and all of God's loved ones.

The Funeral Mass for Sister Mary was held on Friday, September 2, 2022, in the Good Counsel Chapel in Mankato with Father Eugene Stenzel as president. A Prayer of Remembrance preceded the funeral, and her remains were buried in the Good Counsel Cemetery. She is survived by many nieces and nephews and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and associates. She is survived by two sisters, Cecilia Stroh and Lorraine Habiger, and was preceded in death by her parents, Liberatus and Anna Marie (Faller) Hecker; her brothers, Frank, Joseph, George, Albert and Peter, and sisters, Rose Michalski, Christine Koch, Theresa Marx, Margaret Reynolds and Marian Schaff.

By Sister Mary Ann Kuttner, SSND