



## *In Loving Memory*

### Sister Mary Immaculata Zoelle

Sister Mary Immaculata Zoelle, 78, died Saturday, March 24, 2018, at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. She was the only daughter of three children born to George and Genevieve (Hans) Zoelle in Watertown, Wisconsin. At birth, she was given the name Virginia Lee.

During Virginia's childhood, education was a controversial matter in the Zoelle household. Virginia's father was Lutheran and her mother was Catholic. Virginia and her brothers were raised Catholic and attended Catholic school, despite the fact her father wanted his children to be raised Lutheran. He continually threatened to enroll them in public school.

School was never easy for Virginia. Her mother worked tirelessly with Virginia every day after school and during the summer to ensure she would pass to the next grade. Virginia's mother was afraid that if Virginia didn't pass, her father would take the children out of Catholic school. Virginia did repeat fifth grade, but her brother, who was in the fifth grade during the same time she repeated it, strongly supported her.

During her childhood, Virginia was very close to her paternal grandmother, Sarah Zoelle, spending a great deal of time reading Scripture, talking about Jesus and singing in German. Virginia regarded her mother as her best friend; the two of them did everything together.

Even though she found school challenging, Virginia loved and admired the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was drawn to their love, kindness and complete dedication to their vocation. In her autobiography, she remembers, "I prayed a lot about becoming a sister. I wanted to be like my teachers. I found school very difficult, and I knew I could never be one. My teachers advised against high school. Sister Mary Columbine Kumba and the pastor felt that I should graduate with my class because I had struggled and worked so very hard."

Virginia's dream to become a sister persisted. In the summer of 1955, she brought home the papers to become a postulant with the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent DePaul in Watertown, Wisconsin. Her father signed the papers but remarked that he thought she would become homesick and return home two weeks after entering. In September 1955, after graduating eighth grade, Virginia became a postulant with the Sisters of Charity. She was received into the novitiate in March 1956. During her second year as a novitiate, Virginia's father told her she had to return home. In her autobiography, Virginia recalled, "I told him I'd rather die than come home. He was so shocked, he let me stay."

In March 1958, Virginia professed and took the name Mary Immaculata. Her first mission was to St. Elizabeth's Home for the Aged in Janesville, Wisconsin, where she cared for 22 women. She was then sent to take charge of the student refectory at St. Joseph's College in Edgerton, Wisconsin, in August 1959. The Sisters of Charity gave up their work at St. Joseph's College in August 1960, so Sister Immaculata went to Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis, where she worked in the laundry and at the student refectory for three years.

*continued*

**Birth**  
November 27, 1939

**Baptism**  
December 10, 1939

**Profession**  
March 15, 1958

**Death**  
March 24, 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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During the summer of 1963, Sister Immaculata returned to Watertown, Wisconsin, to prepare for perpetual vows. During this time, she was in charge of a wing at St. Joseph's Home for the Elderly, where she cared for 23 women. She was also working on her nursing assistant certification. On March 14, 1964, she took her perpetual vows and continued her mission at St. Joseph's Home.

After the release of the Vatican II documents, the leadership of the Sisters of Charity did not appear to be implementing any the decrees that applied to religious orders, which concerned Sister Immaculata. After prayer and consideration, she informed her spiritual director that she wanted to transfer to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, believing they were actively living out the decrees of Vatican II. After submitting written requests to Pope Paul VI and Mother Georgianne Segner, SSND, she was officially allowed to join the School Sisters of Notre Dame in November 1970.

After becoming an SSND, Sister Immaculata served as a nurse's aide at Notre Dame Health Care Center. She reflected about this mission in her autobiography, stating, "The sensation that stays with me is one of being home, being where I belong, for SSND is truly home for me. I'm filled with a sense of pride and love and joy for our congregation." In 1983, Sister Immaculata served as a certified nursing assistant at Mount Carmel in Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin. She returned to Notre Dame Health Care Center in April 1984, first serving as a certified nursing assistant and later as a personal care assistant. Starting in August 1994, Sister Immaculata began caring for sisters' veils in addition to her ministry as a personal care assistant.

She moved in with her mother in August 2003, in order to care for her, but remained part of the NDEG community. After her mother passed away in May 2010, she moved back to NDEG and resumed caring for sisters' veils. She also became a eucharistic minister.

Sister Immaculata enjoyed baking, celebrating sisters' birthdays and visiting relatives. She also loved caring for dogs.

At the end of her autobiography, Sister Immaculata tells of her admiration of Blessed Mother Theresa. She writes, "I am deeply touched by her love for Jesus, her love and care for her sisters, her self-denial and importance of God's will in her life. She is magnificent and awesome for me." The traits Sister Immaculata admired were reflected in her own life and demonstrated to everyone around her what it meant to live a life of service, faith and love.

A Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Immaculata was held on Wednesday, March 28, at Notre Dame of Elm Grove chapel preceded by a visitation and prayer service. Burial was at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin.

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