



# *In Loving Memory*

## Sister Mary Joan Trombley

Sister Mary Joan (formerly M. Sylvester) Trombley, 87, died on Saturday, August 11, 2018, at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. She was born in St. Paul and was the oldest daughter of Lester and Lillian (LaRock) Trombley.

**Birth**  
October 17, 1930

**Baptism**  
October 23, 1930

**Profession**  
July 17, 1952

**Death**  
August 11, 2018

**Burial**  
Our Lady of Good Counsel  
Cemetery

By the time Mary Jo graduated from eighth grade in 1945, she had attended four different Catholic Schools in St. Paul and was taught by members of four different religious congregations. She attended ninth grade at a local public school and enrolled in St. Francis de Sales for her sophomore year, where she first met School Sisters of Notre Dame. In September 1947, she became an aspirant at Good Counsel Academy and graduated from there in 1949. In August, she entered the SSND candidature at Good Counsel. Following a year of study, she taught grades three and four at St. Peter School, Hokah, Minnesota. In July 1951, she was received into the novitiate at Good Counsel and given the name Sister Mary Sylvester. She later returned to her baptismal name of Mary Joan, which was shortened to Mary Jo.

Following profession of first vows in 1952, Sister Mary Jo was missioned to St. Agnes School, St. Paul, where she taught grade four and assisted with sacristy work. Beginning in 1955, she was missioned to St. Paul, Comfrey, Minnesota, where she taught grades three, four and five and was responsible for the sacristy and servers. From 1957 through 1963, she taught intermediate grades at St. Cyril and Methodius, Minneapolis; St. Matthew, St. Paul, Minnesota; St. Mary, Marystown, Minnesota; Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Paul, Minnesota; and Christ the King, Omak, Washington. She earned a B.A. degree from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1960.

In the late 1950s, Pope John XXIII asked the North American and Western European churches to send 10 percent of their priestly and religious personnel to Latin America and other developing countries. In response, the Mankato Province leadership asked sisters to indicate an interest in serving in Latin America. Sister Mary Jo wrote this to Mother Bernardia Gores in August 1961: "I volunteer for the South American missions. I'm 30, past final vows, had a good report from the doctor, and I've always wanted to work in the missions. The rest is up to you." In August 1962, the Mankato Province sent their first group of missionaries to Nahuala, Guatemala.

Sister Mary Jo and Sister Conrad Schwab (now Sister Rose) were chosen as the second missionary group. The pastor of San Bernadino in the Guatemalan highlands city of Patzún had petitioned Mother Bernardia for sisters in 1962, and she was able to meet his request one year later. The two sisters arrived in Patzún in August 1963. Their celebration of welcome extended for three hours and included Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in church and a parade through town. Sisters Mary Jo and Conrad then spent several months in Antigua learning Spanish. A Catholic school in Patzún was already in operation under the direction of lay teachers, and it was here that the sisters began their ministry in January 1964. They helped coordinate school activities and taught

*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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English and religion. They were commended for introducing a new method of education that went beyond the mere memorization of facts and instead emphasized critical thinking skills.

In January 1968, Sister Mary Jo returned to Minnesota and resumed her Catholic school ministry, teaching intermediate and junior high grades at St. Agnes, St. Matthew and Holy Childhood, all in St. Paul; St. Peter, Hokah; and Fitzgerald and Loyola, Mankato.

Sister Mary Jo had an interest in science and was also adept at fixing whatever needed fixing. In 1978, she became part of the maintenance staff at Our Lady of Good Counsel and earned an engineer license, which enabled her to service the boilers. A 1981 article called her “Ms. Fixit” and described her role, “Officially, she serves as liaison for Sister Mary Roman Adam, coordinator of temporalities, checking repair requests, directing the men in their varied jobs about the Hill, and setting up and supervising the work of people sent by the county probation office to work off time.” The article expanded on this role, stating that Sister Mary Jo would help with car maintenance, mow the campus grass and answer troubleshooting calls. At some point, one of the men installing combination windows mentioned that the St. Joseph Hall roof would be ideal for a repeater radio to aid in times of disaster or when the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) was engaged in search and rescue operations. The installation of this repeater led Sister Mary Jo to join CAP as a communications officer, where she reached the rank of captain.

Sister Mary Jo’s next ministry was in the Our Lady of Good Counsel kitchen, where she worked from 1984 until 1989, when she became the cook at the SSND Generalate in Rome. Serving in food service emphasized another of Mary Jo’s skills – preparing meals for large groups. She delighted in providing meals – both simple and festive – for sisters and guests.

After she returned from Rome in 1991, Sister Mary Jo became the province audio-visual specialist. The 1994 renovation of the chapel included provision for a video camera through which she was able to televise the daily liturgy throughout the motherhouse on closed-circuit TV. She also videotaped province events, learned how to use video-editing equipment to produce quality videos and could often be found in her recording studio working on various projects. Interested in photography from her childhood, she became the campus photographer and was seen carrying one or more cameras to events. She semi-retired in 2006, but continued in an active role in several capacities.

The funeral liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held Friday, August 17, at Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel. A prayer service of remembrance preceded the funeral liturgy. Burial of her cremains followed in the Our Lady of Good Counsel cemetery. She is survived by her brother, John (Arlene), her sister, Marlene (Dawayne) Novak, her sister-in-law, Mary Trombley, 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, Lester and Lillian (LaRock) Trombley, and her brother Lester.

*By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND*