



In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Joel Robin, SSND

Born in Detroit, Michigan on Oct. 6, 1922, to Frank and Gertrude (Kirsten) Robin, she was baptized Lillian Rita at St. Anthony Church, Detroit. She was the youngest of seven children. In her autobiography she claims she received much attention and was spoiled. Her mother came with her family from Germany at the age of 11. Her father was a native of Detroit. They were good Catholic parents and brought their children up in the faith, praying evening prayers together and being involved in St. Anthony's parish and school in Detroit.

Birth
Oct. 6, 1922

Baptism
Oct. 8, 1922

Profession
July 23, 1942

Death
March 23, 2016

Burial
Notre Dame of
Elm Grove Cemetery
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

When Lillian was 3 years old she lost her sister, the second youngest in death, at age 6, from black diphtheria. Since they were very close to each other, her loss influenced Lillian to become a serious, thoughtful and shy child. Lillian received her elementary education at St. Anthony, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. One of the happiest days of her life was in the second grade when she made her first Communion. In fourth grade she helped Sister Ethelwald in church. This lasted for eight years, bringing her in close contact with the sisters whom she grew to love.

Lillian enjoyed attending St. Anthony High School. At the end of her sophomore year she felt an urge to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She had the opportunity to visit the motherhouse and was strongly drawn to it but knew, because of her age, she would have to wait another year. She had to tell someone of her decision. Finally she wrote a letter to her mother telling her about her decision. After she did that, she had the grace to face her mother and talk her decision over with her. In quick succession, she informed her father, the sisters and her confessor.

In June of 1939 Lillian applied for admission and joyfully entered the candidature at the former Milwaukee motherhouse in September. As a candidate Lillian needed a half credit for graduation and was asked to take piano. At the end of that year, instead of being sent out on mission, she was to stay at the motherhouse and take organ and piano lessons for further work in music.

She was received into the novitiate on July 22, 1941 and given her religious name, Mary Joel. She professed first vows on July 23, 1942. Sister Mary Joel completed a bachelor's degree with a major in mathematics and minors in Latin and English at Mount Mary College, Milwaukee in 1955. She earned a master's degree in mathematics education at the University of Detroit in 1965.

Her first obedience as musician and teacher was at St. George, Kenosha but due to illnesses and changes on staff, Sister Mary Joel's music and teaching skills were needed at St. Michael's, Milwaukee. Sister Mary Joel recalled that Mother Fidelis once asked her in her early religious life, "Don't you want to be God's football?" She was emphatic with her answer, "No." Sister Mary Joel wondered if that remark connected to her feeling that she was leading a nomadic life – moving from Wisconsin to Illinois, back to

*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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Wisconsin, then Michigan, back to Wisconsin for a few years, then finally Michigan, until she needed to come to Elm Grove.

In the midst of her changes she wondered, “Why, why me?” and often rebelled. When she had times of silence and reflection, God gave her a jolt when she realized, “It was God’s way for me. Who am I to resent the happenings in my life? They all fit in God’s pattern and God’s plans must be mine to receive true peace!”

While living with different religious communities, Sister Mary Joel met often with SSNDs in the area in her extended community. During the years of the Tri-State Region, She was active on the Regional Assembly and on its committees.

She was a good teacher as claimed by her students, very capable of setting up the school schedule at St. Anthony’s High School, generous with her time and talents in school and community. She helped with cooking if needed and visited and cared for her parents confined to a nursing home.

Sister Mary Joel ministered as an educator for 49 years. Initially, she taught music to elementary students but her primary call was teaching high school math. She served at the following schools in Wisconsin: St. George, Kenosha; St. Michael, Milwaukee; Sacred Hearts of Jesus & Mary, Sun Prairie; Maryheart High School, Pittsville and Catholic Central High School in Marinette. In Illinois, she taught at: St. John De La Salle, Chicago and Academy of Our Lady, Chicago. Her teaching assignments in Michigan were: St. Anthony, Detroit; Gabriel Richard High School, Riverview; St. Mary’s, Detroit; and Aquinas High School, Southgate.

When she left classroom teaching, Sister Mary Joel assisted a couple of medical offices with secretarial support until her 1995 retirement. In retirement, she initially lived in Michigan where she served through prayer and presence at SSND communities in Grosse Pointe and Fraser. In 2005 she joined the SSND community at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Wisconsin where she lived until moving to Our Lady of the Angels Convent, Greenfield, Wisconsin in 2012.

Sister Mary Joel Robin died March 23, 2016 at Our Lady of the Angels Convent, Greenfield, Wisconsin. She was 93. She is survived by Kathleen Francis, Barbara Anderson, Chuck Sharer, other nieces and nephews, loving extended family and friends, and the SSND Community.

In her autobiography Sister Mary Joel expressed her gratitude for being called to be a School Sister of Notre Dame. She wanted to serve her God with the best she had in her, loving others as they are and letting others know by her words and actions that she loved them. She hoped to be an apostle of LOVE, and she was.

Sister Mary Joel’s 70th Jubilee words of wisdom in 2012 were:

*“Let God take care of your life. Don’t worry.
God is with us every minute of the day.”*

This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information and the eulogy prepared by Sister Joan Bakle, SSND and Sister Brigid O’Reilly, SSND