



Birth
August 26, 1932

Baptism
August 28, 1932

Profession
July 31, 1951

Death
February 7, 2021

Burial
Notre Dame of Elm Grove
Cemetery,
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

*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

In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Johnalyn Witkowski

Sister Johnalyn Witkowski begins her biography, “’Twas on the 26th of August of the year 1932 when my Mom and Dad had another little girl to care for. I was the eighth of the nine children in our family. On August 28, I was baptized in St. Casimir’s Church, Milwaukee and received the name Josephine. Perhaps at the time, Mom (Helen Narloch) and Dad (John) surmised that if I began with St. Joseph, I would naturally get close to Mary and end with Jesus.”

When she was only three years old, she was influenced to choose religious life as a way to spend her own life. She had an older sister who had entered the convent. When she came home for vacation as a candidate, little Josephine was impressed and as her sister was preparing to leave, she wanted to “go to Jesus” with her sister, later known as Sister Alma. At her First Communion she remembers asking God if she might be “His forever.” She even took the name, Emily, at Confirmation as a name close to Sister Alma’s.

Josephine attended her parish school through eighth grade. She continued her schooling at the former Milwaukee Motherhouse not far from home. The second year of her high school was at the Academy of Our Lady, Chicago where the aspiranture had moved. Her third year of high school was back at the motherhouse dressed as a candidate for a year and a half. In January of 1950, this candidate was sent to St. Stanislaus, Michigan City, Michigan, to teach 51 little second graders. The following September she had a new name and a new look as a Novice. She was now Sister Mary Johnalyn, named after her mother and father.

When she tried to express how she thought about herself, she commented, “All through the years...I was known as ‘Little Sunshine.’ I am ‘round’ as the sun, but another reason for naming me thus is because I have a cheery spirit and love to make others happy. I must confess here, too, that at times I had a little too much spirit in my laughter, but I always was consoled by the many times I heard, ‘God loves a cheerful giver.’ What more could I desire than His love for me and my love for Him.”

Sister’s gift to the world was to take this love to the classroom. She taught grades one to six from 1951 to 1975 in the following schools: St. Cyril and Methodius, St. Vincent, St. Mary Czestochowa in Milwaukee. Then she was sent to St. Adalbert in Grand Rapids, Michigan for three years. Then for three years in Wisconsin, at St. Stanislaus, Berlin for three years; St. Agnes, Butler for one year; St. Henry, Watertown for two years; St. John Vianney, Brookfield for three years; Bruce-Guadalupe, and De Porres Community in Milwaukee for five years.

In 1975, she decided to serve the elderly at Marina View Manor which she did for four years. Following this she made a connection with a school in Mexico City. She was hired to teach English for both children and adults in Mexico at Apdo, Colonia Napoles and in Zamora Michoacan. After five years, she returned to Elm Grove, Wisconsin, where she did community service and had time for renewal. In 1985 she returned to Mexico to Tacambaro where she visited the elderly and taught English. In 1986 She went to Puerto Rico for two

continued

In Loving Memory

years to minister to our elders in Caguas.

From this time to her retirement at Elm Grove in 2010 she held many short-term positions: nursing assistant, Fund Custodian at Marina View Manor, gift shop clerk, switchboard operator, printer assistant at the Motherhouse, Hostess/waitress at Hardee's Restaurant, clerical secretary, several months helping out at our Generalate and proofreader for the translation of Mother Theresa's letters.

Sister Johnalyn was faithful to her gift of being a cheery person with a call to make others happy from her childhood to the end of her life. Not only did she share her subtle humor and huge smile, but she found ways to meet the needs of others. She maintained a number of projects throughout her retirement, such as having us save our canceled postage stamps, collecting items she could pass on to families in need, and cheerfully convincing the community to give a little in various ways. She truly passed on her joy to others at home and abroad.

By Sister Elise Zettle, SSND

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