



## *In Loving Memory*

### Sister Mary Joyce Pietsch

On the morning of May 4, 2021, word was received of the death of Sister Mary Joyce Pietsch, 96. She died in Notre Dame Health Care at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota.

In 1919, Minnesota-born Joseph and Anna Pietsch moved to Richmond, Virginia, where Joseph and his brother operated a billiard hall/bowling alley. Four of their children were born in Richmond; their second child, Harriet Anne, was born November 7, 1924. In 1930, when Harriet was five, the business failed because of the Depression and the family moved back to Minnesota, settling in North Mankato. Harriet began first grade that fall at Holy Rosary School, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. From the first day of school, she loved the sisters, but didn't think she could become one. Instead, she focused on school and on one of her father's great passions, baseball. She commented, "Many summer afternoons found our family attending ballgames, umpired by my dad."

After sixth grade, Harriet and her family moved across the river to Mankato and she completed her elementary education at SS. Peter & Paul School. During eighth grade, the desire to become a sister again surfaced. However, her dad found employment with the State Conservation Department, and the family moved again, this time to St. Paul. Harriet attended John Marshall High School and graduated in 1942. During High School, she was active in the Catholic Youth Center. Following graduation, she worked for two years filing and typing insurance forms at an insurance company.

Desiring more in life, Harriet entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame candidature in 1944. She wrote, "In between studies, what fun we had playing softball!" The group picture for her candidate class shows her seated on the ground, holding a softball and bat. As a second-year candidate, she taught third graders at St. Andrew School, St. Paul. She was received into the novitiate in July 1946 and was given the name Sister Mary Joyce. After profession of vows in 1947, she taught junior high at St. Matthew School, St. Paul, for two years. In 1949, she was assigned to Strasburg, North Dakota, during a time when Catholic schools functioned as public schools. A law had been passed forbidding the wearing of the religious habit while teaching, which required sisters to wear secular clothing. She remained at Strasburg until 1953, when she moved to Holy Family School, Clarkston, Washington, for one year, and then to Holy Guardian Angels School, Colton, Washington, until 1960. She divided her time between the elementary school and Notre Dame Academy, where she taught shorthand and typing. During her years of teaching, she earned a BA in English from St. Catherine's College (now University), St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1953. She received an MA in education from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, in 1958.

Sister Mary Joyce wrote, "As needs grew in the administration area at Good Counsel, much to my joy, I was called in from the West to do the work I really love – secretarial work and accounting." Her list of meticulously detailed

*continued*

Birth  
November 7, 1924

Baptism  
November 23, 1924

Profession  
July 15, 1947

Death  
May 4, 2021

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 Joyce Pietsch*



job descriptions gives a good picture of how her role changed over the next 49 years. Sister Mary Joyce worked with seven Mankato Provincial Leaders and their Councils. As province secretary, she prepared documents, letters, and lists; kept minutes for various meetings; wrote the province chronicle and obituaries; edited province communications; proofread the writings of others; and answered questions on province history, geography, personnel, events, as well as many other topics. She also kept a well-organized filing system of personnel and other records, saving documents and photos for the Archives. She commented at the time of her 45th anniversary of secretarial ministry, “Over the past 45 years, I have seen many changes – from the days of almost 900 sisters, over 400 Academy girls, less than ten lay employees, about three cars, and wheat fields and gardens where the Education Center now stands – to these days of our being blessed with over 100 dedicated lay employees.” She described another set of changes, “I have seen so many changes over the years – from the days of typewriters (no computers), carbon paper (no copiers).” Sisters who worked with her tell of her reluctance to give up her typewriter for a computer, although she eventually appreciated how a computer could assist in her work.

For the first 27 years, she assisted in various ways with province finances. This gave her the opportunity to attend regional finance meetings in several motherhouses and priories in Minnesota and both North and South Dakota.

Another role that Sister Mary Joyce held was that of secretary for the SSND North American provincial leadership group, a position that she held for 11 years. She wrote about this experience, “I had the opportunity to come to know and appreciate the Provincial Councils and their leadership. I attended meetings in all eight Motherhouses in the United States and Canada, and two highlights were a trip to our Region of Puerto Rico and our Region of Japan, which also gave me an opportunity to go to Hiroshima.” In 1987, she was invited to Rome to serve as one of the secretaries for the General Chapter, another memorable experience.

Her interest in and knowledge of the Minnesota Twins baseball club was legendary. When games were played on the West Coast, she stayed awake, listening to the game until it was completed. On the occasion of her retirement in 2009, she was an honored guest at the Twins Winter Caravan in Mankato.

Throughout her life as a School Sister of Notre Dame, she was appreciative of the “many spiritual advantages, daily prayer with the community, and the life with my companion sisters who are an inspiration to me by their love and lives of dedication.” Sister Mary Joyce retired in 2009, but continued to give service as long as she was able.

The Funeral Liturgy for Sister Mary Joyce, with Father Eugene Stenzel as president, was celebrated May 13, 2021, followed by burial in the Good Counsel Cemetery. She is survived by one sister, JoAnne Blockey; and one brother, Roger (Ruby); 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, Joseph and Anna (Hoehn) Pietsch; her sister, Charlotte St. Martin; and her brother, Joseph.

*By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND*

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of Notre Dame**  
Central Pacific Province

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through education