



Birth
April 1, 1920

Baptism
April 11, 1920

Profession
July 31, 1947

Death
May 28, 2017

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 Karen Anderson, SSND

Sister Mary Karen was born on April 1, 1920, to John and Marie Anderson in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She was given the baptismal name Catherine Isabel. Her father left the family, and her mother raised her and her only sibling, an older brother, Milton, alone. As a newborn, Sister Mary Karen suffered some health issues and wrote in her autobiography, “I was of delicate health and at six weeks of age, my mother took me to Holy Hill, where she made a three week’s pilgrimage placing me under Mary’s protection.”

She attended St. Boniface school in Milwaukee and then Messmer High School. She noted in her autobiography that she had decided around age 12 that religious vocation was not for her. Tragedy struck her small family on a 4th of July outing where her older brother Milton appeared to be drowning, a cousin tried to rescue him and both boys drowned.

Then, as a teenager, her mother died after a long battle with cancer. Sister Mary Karen went to live with her baptismal parents, her aunt and uncle. She wrote of this time in her autobiography, “My days were filled with loneliness and depression, but I found comfort in His words, ‘Even if father and mother forsake you I will not forsake you.’ Darkness and despair did gradually turn into light and joy. While pursuing a course in musical studies, I was chosen to be a professional concert singer. Life was filled with delight.” Mary Karen was a gifted musician who had decided on a career as a professional musician as a young adult. She was also engaged to be married. During the period of her engagement, she felt a strong call to a religious vocation. She wrote of this period in her life, “I was furious and in total shock! Weeks of pain-filled discernment followed, but love conquered. I ended my engagement and all my hopes and plans for a concert career. I surrendered my life to the call of the Master, in trust-filled obedience.”

In December of 1942, she entered candidature with the School Sisters of Saint Francis knowing that Alverno College had a good music program. Sister Mary Karen described her time there as trying, and suffered physically as well. She left for home to recover for several months. During this time, she felt called to the School Sisters of Notre Dame after a long time of prayer and discernment. She wrote in her autobiography, “I entered Notre Dame still fearful, but fear soon melted into peace and a deep awareness that Notre Dame was indeed my true home.” She professed first vows in 1947.

Sister Mary Karen was a graduate of Mount Mary College with a degree in Voice. She spent the majority of ministry as a music educator. She taught music at St. Mary High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, through 1953. She then spent two years of teaching high school at St. Michael in Chicago. Mary Karen then served in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, as

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Mary Karen Anderson



a teacher, musician and administrator for middle school students at St. Vincent de Paul Grade School, for a total of 21 years. She continued to teach music full-time at Mount Mary University in Milwaukee for most of the next decade. Sister Mary Karen served the as a receptionist at the Visitation Home in Elm Grove from 1986 through 1990. Once retired she served in prayer and presence at Notre Dame of Elm Grove.

Sister Mary Karen died May 28, 2017, at the age of 97. She is survived by the SSND community and was preceded in death her parents and her brother, Milton Anderson.

This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information.

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**School Sisters
of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

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