



In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Lauren Spence

Sister Mary Lauren Spence, 95, died peacefully in her sleep at 4 a.m. on November 30, 2022, at Benedictine Living Community – St. Gertrude’s, Shakopee, Minnesota.

The only child of Joseph and Margaret Spence, Sister Mary Lauren was born in Mankato, Minnesota, on December 10, 1926, and baptized Veronica Margaret, on Christmas Eve at St. Thomas Church near Le Sueur, Minnesota. Five months later, her mother died, and her father moved to Henderson, Minnesota, where her grandmother and aunt also lovingly cared for her. In her autobiography, she wrote: “My Dad would often tell me stories in the evenings when he was home from the office. Once he pointed to the bright evening star and said that it was my mother watching us from her place in heaven. Many times, I brought my problems and joys to ‘my star.’ This nearness to my mother lingered throughout my life.”

Veronica attended the public school in Henderson, Minnesota, and summer vacation days were spent in Walker, Minnesota, where “separated from the busy world by stately pines and a rippling lake, I learned to know God through nature.” She loved to sit in a little boat on the water, watch the animals and gaze at all the beautiful colors.

She made her first Holy Communion in 1932, at St. Joseph Church in Henderson, and was confirmed there in 1939. The next year, she began high school at Good Counsel Academy, Mankato, Minnesota, where School Sisters of Notre Dame were her teachers, and by the time she graduated in 1944, she had decided to become one of them. This was difficult for her father, but in time he accepted her decision and she entered the SSND candidature on August 28, 1944. After one year of college classes, she began 36 years of educational ministry at St. Matthew School in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she taught 48 children in the fourth grade.

On July 14, 1946, Veronica was received into the congregation and given the name Sister Mary Lauren. She professed her religious vows on July 15, 1947, and was sent to St. Francis de Sales in St. Paul, where she taught junior high school students for two years (1947-1949) and later an additional four years (1954-1958). From 1949 until 1954, she taught at St. Peter School in Hokah, Minnesota. During this time, she also earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Mount Mary College (now University) in Milwaukee.

Sister Mary Lauren earned an M.A. in Art from the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, in 1962. Her thesis project, a Smalti mosaic of Our Lady of Good Counsel, received the highest honor bestowed on a thesis by the university and was selected to be “held” on exhibit at Notre Dame for two years.

She taught art and other subjects to high school students at St. Michael School

continued

Birth
December 10, 1926

Baptism
December 24, 1926

Profession
July 15, 1947

Death
November 30, 2022

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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in St. Michael, Minnesota (1958-1966), Good Counsel Academy in Mankato (1966-1973), and Trinity High School in Dickinson, North Dakota (1973-1978). She then studied German while living in the SSND motherhouse in Munich, for a little over a year (1978-1979). After she returned to Minnesota, she taught at Totino-Grace in Fridley, for one year (1980-1981) before serving on the staff at the SSND Generalate (the congregation's headquarters) in Rome (1981-1987). During this time, she made extensive use of her artistic skills and was present in 1985, for the beatification of Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, the foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. On this occasion, she created a series of posters depicting the life and ministry of the sisters in each of the congregation's 21 provinces and four regions.

Following a four-month renewal program at St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Mississippi, she resumed her educational ministry at St. Mary's in New England, North Dakota (1988), Trinity High School in Dickinson, North Dakota (1988-1992) and Crucifixion School in La Crescent, Minnesota (1992-1993). She then returned to Mississippi, where she was in charge of the sisters' craft room at St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa (1993-1996).

Sister Mary Lauren returned to Mankato in 1996, and was in charge of the sisters' craft room at Our Lady of Good Counsel until 2001. Not long after her retirement, she was introduced to Amy Berman, the head of the Mother Bear Project, which sends knitted teddy bears to African children who have lost their parents to HIV or AIDS. She began by knitting two bears for the project in 2003; by the time she celebrated her 90th birthday in 2016, she had completed more than 2,222 bears. In Amy's words, "Each one of her bears is a work of art, and she puts so much love into each one." Sister Mary Lauren would pray for each child who would receive one of her bears, "a prayer for comfort, for safety, and for love."

Throughout her long life, she had prayed, "Accept the work of my hands, O Lord," not only in words, but also by creating beautiful works of art and enabling many others of all ages to do the same. May Sister Mary Lauren now enjoy the fullness of life with God and all her loved ones in the beauty of our heavenly home!

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Lauren was held Monday, December 5, in the Windermere chapel, Shakopee, with Father John Kunz as presider. Visitation and sharing of memories preceded the liturgy. Burial of her remains in the Our Lady of Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato followed. She is survived by her cousins and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND associates. She was preceded in death by her parents Joseph and Margaret (Fitzpatrick) Spence.

By Mary Ann Kuttner, SSND