

In Loving Memory

Sister Mary (Mary Mark) Tacheny



Birth
October 3, 1924

Baptism
October 12, 1924

Profession
July 22, 1945

Death
December 22, 2023

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

Our beloved Sister Mary (Mary Mark) Tacheny, 99, died at 2:30 a.m. December 22, 2023, at Benedictine Living Community, Shakopee, Minnesota. Her health had declined in recent weeks. Both sisters and family members had been visiting and praying with her.

October 3, 1924, marked the arrival of Adeline Elizabeth, the first daughter and second child to John and Magdalen Tacheny of rural Mankato. Adeline was baptized nine days later at SS. Peter & Paul Church in Mankato. In her autobiography, Sister Mary remembered that her brother, Cletus, two years older and her sister, Eleanor, two years younger and she “got along well together and that what one did, all three did.” She relished growing up on the farm and this played an important role in her future. “My whole life previous to my entrance into the convent was spent in life on a farm, in the pure and open loveliness of the countryside. We were taught a good wholesome kind of fun on the farm that could be had on the land – whether in the woods among the wild flowers, on the sloping bank of the Le Sueur River at the bottom of our pasture, in the grasses of the meadow, or in the shaded rows of corn.” The Tacheny family also made their Catholic faith a priority, with the family rosary and other prayers part of the daily routine.

In 1930, shortly before her sixth birthday, Adeline enrolled in first grade at SS. Peter & Paul School. She commented, “School proved to be a source of joy and I soon learned to love my teachers, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. . . . Mom and Dad were always sending food items with us to take to the sisters, so we got to know the ‘cook sisters’ very well.” Sister Pia Becker was named as having an especially strong influence on her life.

Adeline graduated from Loyola High School in 1942. Although she planned to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame, her entrance was delayed about six weeks because of a 4-H trip to Chicago that she had earned. On October 15, 1942, she became a candidate at Our Lady of Good Counsel, with the whole family accompanying her. Adeline’s first weeks as a candidate were difficult as she tried to catch up with classes that had been in progress for six weeks. As a second-year candidate she taught at Sacred Heart School, St. Paul. In July 1944, she was received into the novitiate and given the name Sister Mary Mark. She professed first vows in 1945.

Sister Mary Mark began her teaching ministry at St. Anthony High School, Lismore (1945), and continued at St. Matthew Junior High, St. Paul (1947-50). In January of 1950, she became a full-time student at St. Catherine’s College (now University), St. Paul, and completed her B.A. in June. In fall, 1950, she started the first ninth grade class at St. Michael School, St. Michael – the beginning of St. Michael High School. From 1955 through 1965, she taught English and math at Notre Dame High School, Cresco, Iowa, and served as principal there the last eight years. She earned an M.A. from St. Louis University, St. Louis, in 1958. After teaching one year at St. Agnes High School, St. Paul, Minnesota, her final service in formal education was another new venture. School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Christian Brothers opened Grace (later Totino Grace) High School in Fridley in 1966. Sister Mary Mark was named the first principal of the school. The school started with grade nine, and each successive year another grade was added until the first class graduated in 1970. By that time, there were almost 1200 students in the school. She commented, “The years at Grace were busy and challenging as we worked hard to create a community spirit among faculty, staff, students and parents.” The legacy of SSND and Sister Mary Mark is still held in high esteem by the current Totino Grace family.

Sister Mary Mark’s term as administrator was completed in 1975, and she was asked to companion Sister Mayette Hughes at a home for unwed mothers in Winona while updating her resumé with classes at St. Mary University. In 1976, the provincial leader of the Mankato SSND province, Sister Eunice Silkey, asked her to consider a different type of educational role. The Minnesota Catholic Conference of Bishops had asked for a sister educator who could work with diocesan rural life directors, who were diocesan priests, to “establish boards and energize people at a time when many farms were being foreclosed. The loss of farm families was having a direct influence on parishes. It seemed to be a formidable task but after continuous nudging, I said ‘yes’ and that ‘yes’ changed my life. It turned out to

continued

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(Mary Mark) Tacheny*



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be one of the most stretching experiences I had ever undertaken.” The position put her in touch with her rural heritage and introduced her to several other related groups, The Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC), the Land Stewardship Project and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. During her first several years in the position she worked with Minnesota rural life directors and those of 11 other Midwest states to write a pastoral letter, “Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland.” She helped the directors conduct discussion groups with farm families across the six Minnesota dioceses to express their concerns on the serious issues they were facing. This process enabled rural people to literally write the document. In May of 1980, 72 bishops endorsed the document, and a process was set up to study it.

In 1980, the bishops appointed Sister Mary Mark to a newly created position of Rural Life Coordinator for the Minnesota Catholic Conference. She traveled around the state bringing awareness of farm issues. A colleague commented, “She has a very big heart. Yet, she also has a very aware and feisty side. She knows who the enemies of the land are, where the problem needs to be corrected.” In 1985, Sister Mary Mark was asked by the bishops to add lobbying at the Minnesota Legislature to her position. She wrote, “It soon became clear to me that the best approach for this was to prepare rural folks to speak for themselves at the Legislature. I spent significant time helping rural people to be prepared to come before a committee and speak to the issue at hand.”

Sister Mary Mark worked for the Minnesota Catholic Conference until 1994, when she and Sister Kathleen Storms became co-directors of the Mankato Province’s Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (CESRM) at Our Lady Good Counsel, Mankato. She wrote, “We committed ourselves to practice reverence for all creation on Good Counsel Hill, to support rural parish communities and those who minister there and to work with other organizations that struggle to keep land and gardens, and people together.” On the Hill they took leadership in reversing the eroding hillsides, establishing the community leading the Kierlin Garden project, that involved restoring the “Red Barn,” adding the gazebo and walkways, and fencing the community gardens, through a grant from Sister Sabina Kierlin’s family. They partnered with Blue Earth County in conservation projects and were instrumental in forming the province’s Earth Committee. The annual Earth Conference developed from this committee. They provided educational and reflective opportunities for sisters and laity. Sister Mary remained active on the Land Stewardship Project’s Board until 2007, when she was granted the status of Emeritus Board Member.” (Around this time, she discontinued the use of “Mark” in her name.)

Sister Mary retired, but not really. She and Sister Lalande Hennen began a ministry of presence at St. John the Baptist Parish in Jordan, 2003. She was a member of the liturgy committee and a Eucharistic minister, brought Communion to nursing home residents and belonged to the quilting committee. In 2014, she returned to Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, and continued her earth advocacy by serving on the planning committee for the annual Earth Conferences. Adept at using the computer, she wrote a comprehensive history of CESRM in 2021. Shortly before moving to Shakopee in 2022, Sister Mary composed a letter to the purchaser of Our Lady of Good Counsel, explaining the values that were a part of the Hill since its beginning. She remained close to her family and enjoyed visits with the several generations of family members and was proud of their accomplishments.

The wonders of creation were close to Sister Mary’s heart. She shared her love of earth with so many. May she now enjoy an everlasting vision of the wonders of God’s creation.

Sister Mary requested a green burial. She was buried at 3 p.m. December 22, 2023, in the Good Counsel Cemetery, Mankato, Minnesota. Several sisters, family members and friends gathered there for her burial. A Memorial Mass was held Monday, January 29, 2024, in the Windermere Chapel, Shakopee, with Father Joe Fogal as presider. Visitation and Sharing of Memories preceded the Liturgy. Sister Mary is survived by her sister, Eleanor Caven; her brother, Tom (Jolee); her nieces and nephews and their families; her friends and former colleagues; the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) and SSND associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, John and Magdalen (Scheurer) Tacheny; her sisters, Delphine Lovell and Louise Czaplowski; and her brother, Cletus.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND