



In Loving Memory

Sister Paul Therese Saiko

Sister Paul Therese Saiko, 83, died Monday, April 17, 2017, in Notre Dame Health Care, Mankato, Minnesota. The previous week she had been hospitalized in St. Paul, but returned to Good Counsel on Good Friday and entered Hospice. Sisters and family members were keeping vigil with her during her last days and were with her when she died.

Sister Paul Therese, the youngest of seven children, was welcomed into the Saiko family on December 1, 1933, in St. Paul. She was baptized Phyllis Therese on December 10 at the Church of St. Agnes. In later writings she attributed her strong faith life to both her “loving and devout family” and parish church community: “In addition to my family, a faith-filled domestic church, the parish church community contributed immensely to my life of faith. It was there I watched as my parents actively participated in its vibrant life.” She learned about helping others as she accompanied her father when he delivered food to the poor as a member of the St. Vincent DePaul Society. From her mother, who traveled extensively, she received a spirit of adventure.

In 1938, Phyllis enrolled in kindergarten at St. Agnes School. She wrote of her school days, “It was there that I came to admire the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who were not only excellent teachers, but great friends.”

As a high school student, Phyllis began to think seriously of religious life. Her brother was already a member of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and her sister Dorothy had become a School Sister of Notre Dame. As a sophomore, she discussed this with her parents and made the difficult decision to leave St. Agnes, which she loved, to become a junior aspirant at Good Counsel Academy in Mankato. She graduated from Good Counsel in June, 1951, and entered the SSND candidature in August. As a second year candidate she did her practice-teaching at St. Peter, Hokah. At her reception into the novitiate, she was given the name Sister Mary Paul Therese (which was often shortened to “PT” by friends and colleagues). She professed first vows in 1954.

In her first years of SSND ministry, Sister Paul Therese taught at John Ireland, St. Peter (1954-56); Sacred Heart, St. Paul (1956-59); St. Joseph the Worker, Mankato (1959-61); Holy Childhood, St. Paul (1961-65); and St. Anne, Bismarck, North Dakota (1965-67), where she was also principal. She earned her bachelor’s degree from Mount Mary College in 1963.

She described the next chapter of her life in this way: “In 1967 my life changed dramatically when Sister Margareta Bertrand, our Provincial Leader, called me into her office and invited me to prepare for a new service within the community. Sister Alberta, our novice director, was nearing retirement. I was to go off to school to prepare to be the next novice director. I was stunned.” She spent the 1967-68 year studying theology and scripture at the University of San Francisco, where she later completed a master’s degree in theology. In 1968, she met her first of several classes of novices. In 1984, she recounted her time with the novices: “I entered upon

Birth
December 1, 1933

Baptism
December 10, 1933

Profession
July 21, 1954

Death
April 17, 2017

Burial
Our Lady of Good Counsel
Cemetery
Mankato, Minnesota

*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

continued

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Central Pacific Province

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THROUGH EDUCATION

an assignment that ranks among the richest of my life. These were the days of radical change and unanticipated crisis in the world, the nation, the Church and religious life. For the next eight years, I interacted with some truly outstanding groups of young women who came from this new world with myriad questions, deep Christian commitment, radical generosity and a hope for the future that energized all of us.”

Sister Paul Therese was elected to the SSND Mankato Provincial Council in 1975. She wrote about the experience: “Working with the community as a whole added yet another dimension to the deep respect and admiration I have for the goodness and generosity of religious women.” Following the completion of her second term in 1983, Sister Paul Therese spent the next year on sabbatical.

In 1984, Sister Paul Therese was invited to join the formation staff as a spiritual director at St. John Vianney Minor Seminary and the Saint Paul Major Seminary. These two part-time positions eventually became a full-time position at the Saint Paul Seminary: a member of the formation faculty and a teacher of Scripture and spiritual direction. An article, written at the time of her retirement in 2014, listed her titles at the seminary as she worked for five rectors and with eight spiritual directors: “Academic Advisor; Teacher; Full-Time Formation Faculty Member; Admission Committee Member; Coordinator of Evaluations; Coordinator of the Wednesday Morning Spirituality Program; and Coordinator of the Retreats and Days of Recollection.” As a member of the seminary staff, Sister Paul Therese had many opportunities for education and enrichment. She wrote, “The most enriching was traveling to Jerusalem a number of times. Here it is where Scripture came alive in a whole new way. . . . The land where Jesus walked not only has enriched my teaching; it has entered into my very being as daily study of it was part of my life.”

Sister Paul Therese shared her love of Scripture with many others as she conducted days of recollection, taught classes to sisters, or gave talks at parishes. In her retirement years, it was her plan to continue this ministry. Her final presentation was a reflection on Scripture and the Psalms to the Mankato Serra Club in March.

Family and friends were very important to Sister Paul Therese. For several years she spent every weekend with her sister, Sister Cecile, a resident in Good Counsel’s health care. She valued the time spent with her sister, nieces and nephews, as well as with friends.

The Funeral Liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held Monday, April 24, in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial in the Good Counsel Cemetery. She is survived by her nieces and nephew, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, William and Paulina (Hopfauf) Saiko, her sisters, Sister M. Cecile, SSND (Dorothy) and Rosemary Opitz, and her brothers, Father Bill, SVD, George (who died in infancy), Bob and Jim.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND