

# *In Loving Memory*

## Sister Mary Paulissa Jirik

Sister Paulissa Jirik, 89, died in the early morning hours Sunday, July 23, 2023, at Benedictine Living Community – Windermere, Shakopee, Minnesota.



Birth  
March 24, 1934

Baptism  
April 1, 1934

Profession  
July 21, 1954

Death  
July 23, 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

On the eve of the feast of the Annunciation, March 24, 1934, Joseph and Anna Jirik welcomed their ninth child, Loretta Anna, born on the family farm near Lonsdale, Minnesota. She was baptized April 1, at Immaculate Conception Church in Lonsdale. She credited her parents with instilling in her respect and love for all of creation in its many forms. In her autobiography, Sister Paulissa commented, “Participating in church worship and activities was a given, as was family prayer before and after meals and rosary especially during Lent, Advent and the month of May. However, the best times of prayer for me were when we would accompany Dad on a Sunday afternoon as we walked through the fields, when he would make a comment of gratitude or when washing the kitchen floor with Mom and hear her whisper the Hail Mary.”

Loretta attended grades one through eight at Immaculate Conception School, Lonsdale. When the parish high school closed after her eighth grade year, her aunt, Sister Pudentia Marek and her eighth grade teacher, Sister Innocent (Anna) Zeien, both School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), suggested that she go to the aspiranture at Good Counsel Academy in Mankato. She attributed her call to SSND to the example of her parents, family and to the prayers of Sister Pudentia, “my companion, my friend and my mentor throughout my years at Good Counsel Academy.”

Torn between becoming an SSND and wanting to remain on the farm with her parents and family, Loretta graduated in June 1952 and entered the candidature in August. In July 1953, she was received into the novitiate and given the name Sister Mary Paulissa, going by Sister Paulissa. She professed first vows July 23, 2023. Sister Paulissa spent the year after profession with her classmates at Diocesan Teachers College in St. Paul. She treasured the time there with Sister Maureen O’Keefe as a guide in the early stages of professed religious life.

In 1955, Sister Paulissa began her ministry in Catholic Schools, something she called “the love of my life.” She taught intermediate grades at Crucifixion School, La Crescent (1955-57); Assumption School, St. Paul (1957-60); SS. Cyril and Methodius, Minneapolis (1960-61); Immaculate Conception, Gilbertville, Iowa (1961-63); St. Wenceslaus, Dickinson, North Dakota (1963-67); and Epiphany, Coon Rapids, Minnesota (1967-68). In 1962, she earned a BA from St. Catherine’s College, St. Paul.

She described her move from classroom teaching to religious education: “With a surprise call from Sister Margareta Bertrand came an invitation and call to a new ministry, religious education coordinator. Sister Margareta had no qualms but that I would be just fine. She was right! I learned to love being at St. Leo in Pipestone, Minnesota and at St. William in Fridley, Minnesota (1968-73).”

*continued*

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*Sister Mary Paulissa Jirik*



Another invitation and call came in 1973, when Sister Paulissa transitioned into pastoral ministry, first at Corpus Christi (1973-74), then at McDonough Homes (1974-76) and finally at St. Therese (1976-81), all in St. Paul. At McDonough Homes, a federally funded housing project, she worked as a member of a team of four sisters from different congregations. She helped families in navigating the various agencies that served residents, supplied instruction for parents who wanted their children to be baptized and offered prayer and a listening ear.

In 1981, Sister Paulissa answered another call – that of auditor for the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocesan Marriage Tribunal. She prepared cases for judicial decision and served as a field advocate for people seeking annulments. In the early years of this assignment, she completed a master's degree in Pastoral Ministry from Seattle University, Seattle. In 1985, it was suggested that she study canon law to aid her work on the tribunal. The St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocese financed her program of study and in return, she committed to work eight years for the archdiocese. She earned a baccalaureate in Canon Law in 1987, and a Master and Licentiate in Canon Law in 1988, from St. Paul University in Ottawa, Canada. She then became an associate judge for the tribunal. In 1994, she received the Archdiocesan Association of Pastoral Ministers' Mary Mulheron Ministry Award for her dedication to the role of pastoral minister. In the award presentation, she was noted as a member of the founding committee of Theresa Living Center, St. Paul, and one who continued to give moral support, encouragement and regular presence as a volunteer.

Still another call came in 1996, “the opportunity of a lifetime!” She ministered in Rome for two years as a secretary in the Generalate. Her international experience there included time to visit with SSND in the Czech Republic, the homeland of her ancestors. In 1999, Sister Paulissa was asked to minister as a chaplain for St. Joseph's Home for Children in Minneapolis, a shelter for abused, abandoned and homeless children through the age of 17. As “Pastor Paulissa,” she brought a “loving, listening ear” to the children and youth. Sister Paulissa ministered at St. Joseph's Home until 2009, when she became a professional tutor for the East Side Learning Center, St. Paul. That same year, she received Bethel University's “Who's Who in Community Ministry Leadership” award, which again recognized her abilities to “make the worlds of many children, women and men a better place to live.”

For many years, Sister Paulissa lived with her sister, Sister Rita Jirik, and the two of them were active in SSND committees, projects and events. She was close to her family and enjoyed time with her nieces and nephews and their families.

The Funeral Mass for Sister Paulissa was held Monday, August 7, in the Windermere chapel, Shakopee, with Father Paul Treacy as presider. Visitation and sharing of memories preceded the liturgy. Burial in the Our Lady of Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato followed. She is survived by her sister, Rita Jirik, SSND, 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 (Marek) Jirik; her sisters Emeria (Mary) Jirik, SSND, Rose Skluzacek and Helen Smisek; and her brothers George, Joseph, Frank, Ray and John Jirik.

*By Mary Kay Ash, SSND*

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