



In Loving Memory

Sister Rita Marie Schneider

Sister Rita Marie Schneider, SSND, 86, died Monday, February 18, 2019, at Notre Dame Health Care, in Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. The oldest of eight, Sister Rita Marie was born in Minneapolis on August 24, 1932, to Ralph and Rita (Connor) Schneider. The Schneider family resided in Loretto, a small town west of Minneapolis. At her baptism at SS. Peter & Paul Church in Loretto, she was given the name Mary Ann because of her mother's great devotion to the Holy Family and especially to Mary.

Birth
August 24, 1932

Baptism
September 4, 1932

Profession
July 19, 1953

Death
February 18, 2019

Burial
Our Lady of Good Counsel
Cemetery

When Mary Ann started first grade at SS. Peter & Paul School in 1938, she was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame and was already familiar with sisters. Her mother's sister, Sister Cora Connor, was a nurse at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Mankato, and the family visited as often as they could. As a seventh grader, Mary Ann began to think seriously about becoming a sister, and by the time she graduated from eighth grade in 1946, she had decided to enter the aspiranture at Good Counsel Academy. Her parents supported her in this decision, even though it meant sacrificing the help provided by their oldest daughter.

Mary Ann immersed herself into high school life. She was an honor student who enjoyed reading, research and study. She graduated from Good Counsel Academy in June 1950 and entered the SSND candidature in August. As a second-year candidate, she did her practice teaching at SS. Peter & Paul School, in Springbrook, Iowa. She was received into the novitiate in 1952 and given the name Sister Rita Marie. She professed first vows in 1953 and then taught primary grades at St. Matthew School, St. Paul, Minnesota, for one year. Over the next 25 years, she taught at St. John the Baptist, Mankato (1954-56); St. Joseph, Grenville, South Dakota (1956-57); St. Adalbert, Silver Lake (1957-61); St. Casimir, Wells (1961-65); St. Mary, Worthington (1965-70); Sacred Heart, St. Paul (1970-75); and John Ireland, St. Peter (1975-80). She earned a BA in history and elementary education from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, and an MA in reading from Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee in 1973.

*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.*

In autobiographical writings, Sister Rita Marie commented on several experiences from her teaching days: "Even though my ancestry is not Polish, I was missioned to three Polish parishes in succession. First to Grenville, South Dakota, then to St. Adalbert in Silver Lake, and finally to Wells, Minnesota. I learned Polish hymns and prayers and experienced some Polish traditions and foods." Following the 1956-57 school year at Grenville, the sisters left for summer school and retreat. While they were gone, the school and convent building burned to the ground. She wrote, "It (fire) involved the convent, grade and high school, boarders' area and the school lunch room. We lost everything that we did not have with us." After earning her degree in reading, she became the reading specialist in several of the schools where she taught. And in most of the parishes where she was stationed, she was also the sacristan, a religious education teacher and a leader of Bible sharing groups. She was a lector, song leader, choir member and led word and communion services when needed.

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger
Foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame
Letter 11, September 10, 1831

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Rita Marie Schneider



To make a memorial gift,
please visit our secure
online donation page
www.ssndcentralpacific.org/donate



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

Transforming the world
through education

While teaching in St. Peter, Sister Rita Marie became involved in Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) weekends. She also served on Marriage Encounter and Engaged Encounter teams. As a teacher, she saw the need to strengthen married life and families. She wrote, "I began to realize there were a lot of broken families. Something had to be done to help strengthen marriages. I gained from the couples and they gained from me."

Sister Rita Marie's interest in helping families led to a ministry change in 1981. An article in the Diocese of Superior's, Wisconsin, newspaper stated, "When Sister Rita Marie Schneider started working in the Diocese of Superior chancery office in 1981, she was a pioneer of sorts, the first person to hold the position of procurator and advocate for the diocesan tribunal." As procurator, she represented the person petitioning for an annulment of the marriage. As the advocate, she guided the person through the annulment process. One of the priests who worked with her remarked, "She's a very good listener. In working with petitioners or respondents, she is a teacher. She helps explain to people church law; she puts things in perspective." Colleagues also noted Sister Rita Marie's compassion: "Divorce is very upsetting for people. When people come into the office they may have felt intimidated, but Sister Rita Marie had a way of putting people at ease. Then they opened up and told their story." Another colleague commented, "Sister Rita Marie brought something to the Tribunal which was much needed by everyone in the world, and that is a sincere spirituality. Her concern was appreciated by those who benefitted from her service."

During her years in Superior, Sister Rita Marie was instrumental in helping to revitalize the St. Vincent DePaul Society. She was the spiritual advisor for the group and then became the president. "It was a struggle at first to find the poor and to be funded, but gradually we became a viable group doing home visiting to assist needy persons. It proved to be a work of God."

Sister Rita Marie retired in 2005 and spent one year in Owatonna, Minnesota, where she was active on the Food Shelf Board in addition to taking part in parish activities. In 2006, she came to Our Lady of Good Counsel and taught in the Learning Center. She also offered her services to the Winona Diocesan Tribunal, in Winona, Minnesota, first as an auditor and later as an advocate. She continued in this service until 2011. At Our Lady of Good Counsel, she was a choir member, served as sacristan and was a leader of word and communion services until her health prevented her from taking an active role.

The funeral liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held February 27 in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel. A prayer service of remembrance preceded the funeral liturgy. She is survived by her sisters Helen Gunderson, Catherine Dickhausen, Dorothy Hughes and Corinne Anderson; and her brothers James, Richard and Raymond and their spouses; 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 Ralph and Rita (Connor) Schneider.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND