

In Loving Memory

Sister Rosemary (Ritamary) Schwalbe



Birth
October 23, 1947

Baptism
November 9, 1947

Profession
July 17, 1967

Death
May 16, 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

Sister Rosemary Schwalbe died Tuesday, May 16, 2023, at Benedictine Living Community – St. Gertrude’s, Shakopee, Minnesota. Her sister, Rita, SSND, and other sisters were praying with her when she died.

Sister Rosemary, whose family lived in the small town of Nelson, Wisconsin, was born across the Mississippi River in Wabasha, Minnesota, on October 23, 1947. She was baptized Rosemary Louise at St. Lawrence Church, Alma, Wisconsin. Rosemary wrote of her childhood, “Nelson was a very small town but there were many children in the neighborhood and together we found many things to do. We attended the public school in Nelson, so Saturdays and early summer found us riding to Alma for religion classes and vacation school. This is where I first met the School Sisters of Notre Dame.” When Rosemary was beginning fourth grade in 1956, the Schwalbe family moved to Wabasha, so that the children could attend St. Felix Catholic School, staffed by School Sisters of Notre Dame. Rosemary remembered, “I was rather scared of the sisters, yet as long as I can remember, I always wanted to be one.”

During Rosemary’s freshman year, her sister Rita, then a senior, decided to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Mankato. Rita’s entrance day in September 1962, was the first time that Rosemary saw Good Counsel Hill, Mankato, Minnesota. Rosemary continued her education at St. Felix and after her junior year, worked in the clerk of court’s office full-time during the summer and on Saturdays during the school year. At the same time, she was contemplating her future, “It sounds kind of simple when I say I always wanted to be a sister. Yet there is a difference between a desire and the decision to follow that desire.” She registered for college, and at the end of February, found herself with a scholarship for Viterbo College in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in one hand and an application blank for the School Sisters of Notre Dame postulancy in the other. She knew great peace when her decision was made to enter the postulancy.

Rosemary graduated from St. Felix in June 1965, and entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in September. She was received into the novitiate in July 1966, and took the name Sister Ritamary, later returning to her baptismal name. Following profession of first vows in 1967, she remained at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, taking college classes to prepare for her teaching role.

After a year of study, Sister Rosemary received her first teaching assignment in primary grades at St. Michael School in St. Michael, Minnesota. She continued as a teacher of elementary grades at St. Mary, Worthington (1970-75); St. Joseph, Red Wing (1975-76); and Holy Rosary, North Mankato (1976-80). She earned a bachelor of arts degree from Mount Mary College (now University), in 1972.

In 1980, Sister Rosemary was asked to be the director of postulants for the SSND Mankato province (now the Central Pacific Province), a position she held until 1984. During this time, she earned an master of arts in Christian

continued

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*Sister Rosemary
(Ritamarie) Schwalbe*



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Spirituality from Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska, in 1982. The next summer, she received a diagnosis that would change her life. In a 2017 reflection, she wrote, “I was diagnosed with MS [multiple sclerosis] at the age of 35. I have spent half of my life with that, which surprisingly has been the source of many graces.” In April 1984, sisters of the Mankato Province received this message, “Sister Rosemary Schwalbe has completed three and a half years as Director of Postulants. The multiple sclerosis which she suffers now makes it impossible for her to continue in this special ministry to the province. As Sister Rosemary continues to make the necessary adjustments in her life, she will be serving the community as Coordinator of Liturgy here at Good Counsel. We are most grateful to Sister Rosemary for her ministry past and present.”

Living with the challenges of MS sparked a special interest for Sister Rosemary. After taking part in a spiritual directors’ training program, she enthusiastically entered this ministry and journeyed with sisters, clergy and lay people from all denominations in her office area at Our Lady of Good Counsel. In an article describing her ministry, one of listening, she is quoted, “As individuals talk, they become more conscious of God in their lives. The glowing candle [lit at the beginning of the session] reminds them of that presence. Everyone has a direction within. Sometimes we are too busy or afraid to ‘hear’ our inner wisdom. The key is to listen to what people say and reflect that thought back to them, allowing them to go deeper.” She continued, “People don’t have to belong to a particular faith community. The search for God goes beyond a faith tradition. Spirituality is common ground; God is universal.”

In addition to her spiritual direction ministry, Sister Rosemary was involved in other activities on the Hill and beyond. For many years, she volunteered in the Development Office, assisting with various tasks such as opening gift envelopes and recording them and selecting quotations from scripture or other documents for use in the SSND photo calendar. She became an advocate for accessibility, especially for churches, and praised the Our Lady of Good Counsel chapel for its accommodations which included a wheelchair ramp and podium that could be raised or lowered. This allowed her to function as a lector for daily liturgies. Sister Rosemary served on the Marriage Tribunal for the Winona Diocese. Beginning in 2006, she coordinated the “Glimpses of the Divine” column in the SSND Mankato Magazine. She participated in the life and activities of her Marian Community and continued that active participation as she moved to assisted living and finally, skilled care at Our Lady of Good Counsel, and then, St. Gertrude’s in Shakopee, Minnesota. Family, too, played an important role in her life.

The funeral Mass for Sister Rosemary was held Monday, May 22, in the Windermere chapel, Shakopee, with Father Joe Fogal 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 sisters, Rita Schwalbe, SSND, and Elizabeth (Liz) Riley; and her brother, George (Ellie) Schwalbe and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, George and Adelaide (Jerue) Schwalbe.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND