

In Loving Memory

Sister Susan Birk



Birth
September 23, 1934

Baptism
October 7, 1934

Profession
August 1, 1955

Death
December 9, 2019

Burial
Sancta Maria in Ripa
Cemetery, St. Louis

*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 Susan Birk, 85, passed away peacefully at Anna House, The Sarah Community, Bridgeton, Missouri, on December 9, 2019. She was the youngest of four children born to Clara (Siekmann) and Martin Birk on September 23, 1934, in East St. Louis, Illinois. She was baptized on October 7, 1934, at St. Philip's Church and named Barbara Ann. With her two older sisters and a brother, she grew up on a family farm where horseradish was the primary crop.

Barbara attended St. Philip Grade School where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Thinking that she might want to become a sister, she enrolled at the aspirature at Sancta Maria in Ripa. However, her health was not too good, so her doctor advised her to remain nearer to her home. She enrolled at the Academy of Notre Dame in Belleville, Illinois. During her sophomore year, her mother passed away. Since her older sisters were working, Barbara was expected to keep house for her father and brother while completing her high school education. Following graduation, she was employed at Socony Vacuum Oil Company in East St. Louis, Illinois.

After a year of clerical work, Barbara knew that God was calling her to religious life. She received the candidate's bonnet on August 26, 1953, in her home parish of St. Philip, East St. Louis, Illinois, and came to Sancta Maria in Ripa in St. Louis, the following day. She was received into the novitiate on July 31, 1954, and given the name Mary Susan. Profession of first vows was on August 1, 1955, and final vows on August 1, 1961.

Sister Susan was awarded a bachelor's degree in business education from the former Notre Dame College, St. Louis, in 1957 and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, in 1966.

Following profession, Sister Susan began her teaching career at St. Liborius, St. Louis. In 1957, she was one of the first SSND missioned to Mater Dei High School, Breese, Illinois, where she taught business education classes for five years. She was assistant postulant directress from 1962-1967 and then returned to Mater Dei High School as assistant principal for a year. The following year, she became a member of the formation team for junior sisters. In 1973, she began a ten year term in the former St. Louis Province finance office. She was province treasurer during the last four years. In 1983, she was elected to the provincial council for the former St. Louis Province. In November 1987, Sister Susan was elected to the General Council and served two terms in this position at the Generalate in Rome.

Returning to the United States, Sister Susan ministered for a year as a staff member of the Retreat Center at St. Mary of the Pines, Chatawa, Mississippi. She returned to St. Louis and served as the executive secretary to the Provincial of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ). After seven years in this position, she was secretary for Notre Dame Preschool for two years and secretary/receptionist for CSJ Ministries for four years. Once again, she was

continued

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called to serve with initial formation as a community member in the SSND interprovincial novitiate at Sancta Maria in Ripa. She spent her last three years at Ripa in community service.

As her walking became more challenging, Sister Susan was missioned to Veronica House in 2013, and to Anna House the following year. She passed away peacefully around 11 a.m. on December 9, 2019, as sisters prayed with her. She took her last breath as the Marian Hymns concluded with the Salve Regina.

A wake service was held at The Sarah Community and Theresa Center on December 13, 2019. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated the following morning with Rev. Clyde Grogan as presider. Nieces, nephews and their children, other relatives, former students, friends, SSND and Associates were present for the funeral services. She was preceded in death by her parents, her sisters: Lucille Roche and Adella O'Neill and her brother, Martin Birk, Jr.

During her years as a SSND, Sister Susan journeyed with many young women discerning religious life. Her ministry of retreat/spiritual direction included persons in the United States and a six-week experience in Sierra Leone and The Gambia, West Africa in the late 1970s. As General Councilor, she traveled around the world visiting SSND in community and witnessing their ministries. She served as a member on a number of advisory boards, committees and financial organizations. She was chairperson for the preparatory commission and the English-speaking chairperson for the 18th General Chapter in 1987. She was liaison with the General Council, the international preparatory commission and the Mundelein Staff for the 20th General Chapter in 1997, the first General Chapter held in the United States.

Sister Susan was a kind, gentle woman who was always willing to assist and encouraged others to be true to themselves. She was a faith-filled, prayerful, direct and fun-loving person. She was gracious and willing to help sisters with their community or personal budgets and accounts. She was an avid card player and fan of the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team. In addition to her English and German bibles, Sister Susan treasured "100 Things Cardinal Fans Should Know and Do Before They Die" She had an excellent memory for the statistics of many of the baseball teams and their stadiums. To honor this dimension of her life, those present at the wake service at Theresa Center sang "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

However, as Sister Susan's memory failed her, she peacefully gave her life to her God. May she now rejoice with God, her family members and many SSNDs who have preceded her into eternal life.

This remembrance was written by Sister Carol Marie Wildt.