



In Loving Memory

Sister Thelma (Mary LeRoy) Vetsch

Sister Thelma (Mary LeRoy) Vetsch, 97, died on July 9, 2020, in Notre Dame Health Care, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota. Until just recently, she could often be found near the nurses' station in Notre Dame Hall greeting sisters and staff.

Sister Thelma, the second of eight children, was born on the family farm between Albertville and St. Michael, Minnesota, on May 9, 1923. She was baptized Thelma Rosalia Mary Vetsch the next day at the Church of St. Michael. In her autobiography, Sister Thelma wrote, "I loved the farm, and to this day I love driving through the country and seeing the fields and farms. Growing up during the 1930s was a challenge. I learned early that taking care of three young brothers and two sisters would be of some help to my mother, who worked in the house and helped with milking cows and other farm work."

Birth
May 9, 1923

Baptism
May 10, 1923

Profession
July 22, 1944

Death
July 9, 2020

Burial
Our Lady of Good Counsel
Cemetery

In 1929, Thelma started first grade at St. Michael School, where she was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was introduced to sisters even earlier, accompanying her mother to the convent when she gave the sisters farm produce. Thelma described her call to SSND, "Eight years with the sisters helped me to make up my mind to become one of them." She continued, "In the spring of my eighth grade year [1937], Good Counsel Academy in Mankato celebrated its twenty-fifth jubilee by presenting a pageant to which all the schools taught by Notre Dame sisters were invited. The day spent at Good Counsel is still clear in my memory. . . . The chapel above all was a deep inspiration for me." With the help of her eighth grade teacher, Sister Thomasine Burfield, Thelma prepared to enter the aspiranture at Our Lady of Good Counsel, in Mankato, Minnesota, in fall.

The four years of high school passed quickly for Thelma, and she entered the SSND candidature in the fall of 1941. She found college courses challenging but loved her life in the candidature. As a second-year candidate, she taught 31 first graders at St. Stanislaus School, Winona. She commented, "It was a good year and a good experience, a good introduction to teaching and to living in community with other sisters." Thelma was received into the novitiate in 1943 and given the name of one of her brothers, LeRoy, with the patron of Christ the King. In 1944, about one month before Sister Mary LeRoy was to profess vows, LeRoy was in accident, she deeply missed his presence at her profession ceremony.

Following profession, Sister Mary LeRoy (who later returned to her baptismal name) began her ministry in education as a teacher (usually junior high grades), administrator and librarian. In Minnesota, she taught at St. John the Baptist, Mankato; Immaculate Conception, Lonsdale; Assumption, St. Agnes, and Corpus Christi, St. Paul; St. Mary, New Trier; St. Mary, Bellechester, where she was also principal; St. Mary, Worthington; St. John the Baptist, Savage; and St. Francis, Buffalo. She was both principal and teacher at St. Pius, a boarding school in Scheffeld, North Dakota. In Washington State, she was principal and teacher at Christ the King, Omak, and Holy Family, Clarkston. Her final years of teaching were at Immaculate Conception-St. Joseph in Gilbertville and

*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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*Sister Thelma (Mary LeRoy)
Vetsch*



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Raymond, Iowa. At Immaculate Conception, she transitioned to librarian and also did some parish visiting. During her time as teacher and administrator, she earned a bachelor's degree in social studies and English from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, in 1957, and a master's degree in administration from the University of St. Thomas, also in St. Paul, in 1966.

Toward the end of her teaching ministry, Sister Thelma participated in a sabbatical experience in Chatawa, Mississippi, and then assisted in the hosting program at Good Counsel Education Center, Mankato, Minnesota, for two years. In 1985, she moved to Holy Childhood Convent in St. Paul, where she became a loving presence for the next 26 years. She filled a variety of roles at Holy Childhood: school librarian, minister to the elderly, and parish visitor to the sick, elderly and homebound. In a congratulatory message to Sister Thelma in the Holy Childhood parish bulletin, the pastor, Father Gordon Doffing, wrote in part, "Sister Thelma relates so well not only with children, but especially with our senior citizens. I have observed first-hand her wonderful way with the sick and dying. They really perk up when they hear her voice. . . Congratulations on 50 years of professed religious life. You have touched many lives, the result of which will not be revealed to you this side of eternity. When the time finally comes for your retirement (if you ever decide to retire), we hope you will be treated with the same dignity and loving care as you gave to the sick and dying here at Holy Childhood." Sister Thelma echoed some of those thoughts as she said, "My ministry to the elderly and homebound has been most rewarding. I love my visits to them. It has been my privilege to minister to them."

Sister Thelma remained at Holy Childhood until 2011, when she came to Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato. Within a year, she resumed one of her ministries – that of librarian, in the Good Counsel Learning Center. She wrote, "My life here has been a gift. Many opportunities, both spiritual and cultural, are offered here; plus friendships I've made since arrival are all blessings from our Loving God."

Several experiences ranked high on her list of life's highlights, "First and Final Vows, and Silver Jubilee in 1969. That summer my sister, brother-in-law and I went on a trip East and visited historical places in Washington, D.C., New York, Michigan and Canada. My Golden and Diamond Jubilee celebrations at our Motherhouse [Our Lady of Good Counsel] were real celebrations to remember. Our Rome Renewal Program in 1987, a gift from the province, was an awesome experience." Sister Thelma held Christ the King as her patron throughout her religious life. "To Him I owe my years of vowed life, a life that has been fruitful and happy, and at times, challenging."

The Memorial Mass for Sister Thelma will take place at a later date. Evening Prayer with sharing of memories was held on July 22. She is survived by her sister, Rosie Zachman; 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, Clemens and Henrietta (Dehmer) Vetsch; her sister, Greta Anderson; her brothers, Emory, Gene, Francis and LeRoy; and a sister who died at birth.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND