

In Loving Memory

Sister Virginia (M. Bené) Bieren



Birth
June 16, 1938

Baptism
June 19, 1938

Profession
July 17, 1958

Death
December 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

Sister Virginia Bieren, 85, died in her sleep at Benedictine Living Community, Shakopee, Minnesota, Saturday, December 23, 2023. Her death was unexpected, although in recent weeks she had talked of “going home.”

On June 16, 1938, Virginia Rose, the youngest child of Bernard Bieren of Clarkston, Washington, was born across the Snake River in Lewiston, Idaho. Her father’s first wife, Betty, the mother of the three oldest children (Catherine, Cletus and Lillian), died when they were young; the three youngest children were born to his second wife, Veronica, completing the family of six children.

In 1944 Virginia entered first grade at Holy Family School in Clarkston. She had the same School Sister of Notre Dame (SSND), Sister M. Salva (later Loretta) Schmitz, as a teacher in grades three, four, six and eight, and credits her with planting the seed of a vocation to religious life. She also remembered the good example of her parents influencing her life choice. After graduation from eighth grade in 1952, Virginia wanted a Catholic high school education and became a boarder at Notre Dame Academy in Colton, Washington, 20 miles away.

Virginia described her entrance into the SSND postulancy in 1956: “I had never been further east from our home than western Montana, so Minnesota was a long way from home. My sister, Beverly, was married on our entrance day, so I was late in arriving. My sister, Barbara, was then working for Northwest Airlines, so I had a first-time flight from Spokane to Minneapolis to enter the community.”

Virginia was received into the Novitiate at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, in 1957, and given the name Sister M. Bené. She later returned to her baptismal name. Following profession of first vows in 1958, she spent one more year as a student at Our Lady of Good Counsel. In 1959, she received her first teaching assignment, grade five at St. Mary School, New England, North Dakota. Three years later, she received her next assignment – teaching in her home parish of Holy Family, Clarkston, where she taught two of her nephews. In 1966, she moved to Chewelah, Washington, where she taught the middle grades. One year later she was asked to become both teacher and principal, which was problematic at first since she still had not completed her B.A. degree. She earned her B.A. degree from Mount Mary College (now University), Milwaukee, in 1968, and completed an M.A. degree in administration from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, in 1974.

In 1969, Sister Virginia moved east to Bismarck, North Dakota, where she taught for one year at St. Anne’s School and then served as principal and halftime teacher at St. Anne and St. Joseph schools. She remained in Bismarck until 1974, and then taught for two years at Sacred Heart, St. Paul. From 1976 until 1978, she served as administrator of two schools in the southeastern corner of Minnesota, Crucifixion in La Crescent, and St. Peter in Hokah.

Sister Virginia returned to St. Paul in 1978 and became principal of St. James School, a position she held until 1989. In 1981, she teamed with the school’s board of education and Sisters Francette Malecha and Margaret Roozen to

continued

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Bieren*



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begin Sandcastle Daycare in an unused bowling alley in the school basement.

As a school principal, Sister Virginia gained valuable experience in “fund and friend-raising,” and found that she really liked this field. She began doing summer volunteer work by raising funds “in three states and three agencies to broaden my view in the field of development.”

These experiences culminated in Sister Virginia’s appointment as development director for the SSND Mankato Province in 1989. During her years in development, several long-standing events were initiated, including the Gala, Quilt Auction, donor calendar and Christmas ornament. Even before becoming development director, she teamed with Sister Antonette Marie Wagner to start a Craft Fair on the Hill, with all items made by sisters. One of her major projects was raising money for the Good Counsel Chapel renovation and Johnson Organ restoration in 1994. In her role as development director, Sister Virginia also reached out to the broader Mankato community and formed relationships with many area residents. A letter from the provincial council in 1996 read in part, “Not only has Virginia tapped into the resources of potential donors but she has creatively involved all of us in the province. Virginia is known and respected by many who draw upon her knowledge, ability and ingenuity. She has assisted other religious communities as mentor in their beginning stages of development. Virginia has touched the lives of those who are poor by assisting our sisters in their ministries both locally and globally.”

Sister Virginia resigned as development director in 1997 and enjoyed a one-year sabbatical. She then continued in the development field, advising the St. Placid Priory of Benedictine Sisters in Lacey, Washington, as they began a development program. She also served as a development director for Faithful Shepherd Catholic School in Eagan, Minnesota; the development director for Trinity School in St. Paul; and worked as a development associate for the St. Paul Priory of Benedictine Sisters. In 2011, she became part of the Interprovincial Postulate Community in Chicago and volunteered in development for Corazon a Corazon, an English as a Second Language school for Catholic women. She also stayed in close contact with her alma mater, Notre Dame Academy, which had closed in 1961, and was instrumental in organizing an all-school reunion in 2000.

Returning to Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota, in 2014, Sister Virginia was an active member of the Good Counsel Community and continued with crafts, one of her favorite activities. She remained close to her two surviving sisters and their families and stayed connected with many colleagues and friends.

The Funeral Mass for Sister Virginia was held Monday, January 8, 2024, in the Windermere chapel, Shakopee, with Father Michael Decker as president. Visitation and Sharing of Memories preceded the Liturgy. Burial in the Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato took place January 12. She is survived by two nephews and their families and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, Bernard and Veronica (Fuchs) Bieren; her sisters, Barbara Knop, Beverly Gregg, Catherine Behlau and Lillian Parker; and her brother, Cletus.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND