In Loving Memory

Sister Henrita Gonia

Birth
July 4, 1938

Baptism
July 17, 1938

Profession
July 22, 1958

Death
June 2, 2025

Burial
Notre Dame of Elm Grove

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 Henrita Gonia, 86, died peacefully on Monday, June 2, 2025, at Our Lady of the Angels, Greenfield, Wisconsin. She now joins her loving God and family in heaven.

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on July 4, 1938, Edward and Laura Rose Gonia welcomed their tenth child, Patricia Rose. Patricia Rose was baptized on July 17, 1938, at Saint Aloysius, West Allis, Wisconsin.

The family lived in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and the children attended St. John's school where they received their entire grade school education. In her autobiography she noted, "We were fortunate to have ALL School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) during our education." Patricia was influenced by the sisters who taught her, and with no Catholic high school in the area, she received permission from her parents to attend St. Mary's Academy for her four years of high school. To help pay her tuition, Patricia took care of three children for a local family over the summer.

Patricia entered the postulancy on September 4, 1956, in Milwaukee. On July 22, 1957, Patricia received the name Mary Henrita and began her year of novitiate. July 22, 1958, Henrita pronounced her first vows and then final vows July 22, 1964.

Sister Henrita earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Mount Mary College (now University), Milwaukee in 1963 and would later go on to achieve master's degree in education from the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point.

Sister Henrita's ministry experiences were rooted in elementary education, and she would ultimately serve as a teacher for some 45 year. Her education ministry began in 1960 at St. Michael's in Milwaukee, where she taught 54 first graders. Her next mission in 1962 was at St. Agnes in Butler, Wisconsin. A year later, she was sent to Our Lady of Lourdes, in Marinette, Wisconsin, where she remained for five years. In 1968, she was missioned to St. Joachim, in Pittsville, Wisconsin. In 1972 she taught at St. Jerome's in Oconomowoc. In 1974 Henrita was missioned to St. Nicholas in Freedom, Wisconsin.

With her growing classroom experience, Sister Henrita was asked to build a summer educational program for fellow teachers. She helped successfully create a series of "Make and Take" workshops for teachers across all grade levels.

In 1981, she was back in the classroom with first graders at St. Stephen/ St. Joseph, Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Sister Henrita was recognized for her dedication and excellence as an educator with a "Teacher of the Year" award in 1984.

continued

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School Sisters of Notre Dame
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To allow for time to help care for her mom, she took on the role of part-time reading center coordinator at St. Mary in Menasha, Wisconsin from 1987-1988. She then returned to a full-time teaching position at St. Mary's, teaching first and second grades.

Her last decade of teaching (1995-2005) was at Mount Calvary at the Consolidated Parochial Elementary School. In 2004, she was again recognized with an award, "Agriculture Teacher of the Year" for the Fond Du Lac Area. She retired a year later, and by the time she closed her teaching career, she estimated that she taught 1,100 students.

In her 2018 Jubilee reflection, she recalled, "I enjoyed 45 years of leading the little ones, especially in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist."

In 2005, Sister Henrita moved to Sacred Heart Retreat House in Coolville, Ohio, which ended up being well-suited for Sister Henrita in her retirement. As a retreat center, the facility hosted groups for scrapbooking, quilting, family reunions, retreats and swimming parties. She recalled it as being, "a wonderful place." In addition, it had a well-established and thriving associate program, which is still flourishing today.

In 2013, she moved to Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Milwaukee. There, she helped sisters as she could always be patient and kind to others. In December 2021, the sisters moved to Trinity Woods, Milwaukee, and Sister Henrita served to guide and assist others as they navigated the moving process.

On May 27, 2025, Sister Henrita moved to Our Lady of the Angel.

Sister Henrita was a great educator and innovator of many programs. She loved and cared for those around her throughout her life.

The funeral Mass was held on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, at the Mother Caroline Chapel at Trinity Woods, Milwaukee, with Father Leonard Barbian as presider. A prayer of remembrance preceded the funeral. Burial followed in the Elm Grove cemetery.

Sister Henrita is survived by her sister, Mary Ann Wilkins, and nieces, nephews, and the SSND community. She was preceded in death by her parents, Edward and Laura Rose, her brothers; Ervin, Joseph, Harry, Elmer, Eddie, Jacob, Jack, William, and her sisters; Lorraine, Delores, Bernice, and Katherine.

By Sister Marie Rose Van Deurzen, SSND