Birth
October 1, 1939

Baptism
October 15, 1939

Profession
August 1, 1999

Death
August 13, 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

In Loving Memory

Sister Virginia Mary Reichard

Sister Virginia Mary Reichard, 85, died peacefully on August 13, 2025, at Trinity Woods, Milwaukee. She patiently awaited full union with God.

In Milwaukee, on October 1, 1939, Anthony and Isabelle welcomed their first child, a daughter they named Virginia. Virginia was baptized October 15, 1939, at St. Joseph, Milwaukee. Three sisters followed, Susan, Mary Helen and Laura, making the family of six complete. Growing up, family was not just her sisters and parents, but a large extended family of grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins who all lived and enjoyed being together.

Virginia attended St. Joseph grade school through fifth grade. Then the family transferred to St. Michael Parish where she completed grade school. She attended ninth grade at St. Joseph, but went on to spend most of her high school career at Pius XI, which was just opening at the time.

In June 1957, the summer after she graduated high school, Virginia was engaged to her high school boyfriend. She and her husband were married on January 17, 1959. The couple would welcome four children over the course of their marriage; Wayne Anthony, Kathleen Ann, Laura Maryhelen and Beth Marie. Virginia and her husband would later divorce. It was at this time that she made the decision to pursue her college education.

Virginia earned an associate's degree in nursing from Milwaukee Area Technical College, Milwaukee, in 1978 and a bachelor's degree in nursing from Alverno College, Milwaukee, in 1982. From there, she embraced a successful nursing career, working in the surgery department of a community hospital, the psychiatric department of a VA hospital and then as a nurse manager at a convalescent center. In 1986, she accepted a nursing coordinator position at Luther Manor, Milwaukee, in the assisted living area.

While working at Luther Manor, she learned of the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) associate program through a colleague. Interested, she joined the program and ultimately, became an associate for three years. In her autobiography, she wrote, “The associates and sister

continued

In Loving Memory

Sister Virginia Mary Reichard

companions were a source of joy and renewal every time we met. The Heritage trip to Rome and Germany was an experience in community like nothing I had ever experienced before."

She soon began to discern the feeling of being called to more.

Virginia became a postulant in November 1995 and then entered the novitiate on August 7, 1997. She was received at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin, and then went to the Interprovincial Novitiate in St. Louis. Her first profession was August 1, 1999, and her final profession took place on August 3, 2003.

As a novice, she took a chaplaincy training course and would use the knowledge gained there to serve as chaplain for the Kenosha County Jail and Detention Center in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Sister Virginia remained in this role for some nine years, ministering to incarcerated men and women, including immigration detainees.

Of the experience, she wrote, "I have learned that the greatest gift we can give another is to be. Together we can listen to the Spirit in our lives and be able to discern the direction we are to take."

She next ministered as a volunteer teacher's assistant and then spent the decade from 2011 to 2021 engaged in community service around Milwaukee. In 2021, she transferred to Trinity Woods, Milwaukee, where she helped drive and accompany fellow sisters to medical appointments.

In her 2024 Jubilee reflection, she wrote, "Twenty-five plus years ago, life was full and satisfying, yet something was missing. I became a member of SSND and discovered family is not just blood. My blood family and my SSND family have become one. That sense of community is what was missing. Our God is an awesome God."

The funeral was held Tuesday, August 26, 2025, at the Mother Caroline Chapel at Trinity Woods, Milwaukee, with Father Leonard Barbian as presider. A prayer of remembrance preceded the funeral. Sister Virginia Mary is survived by her sisters, Mary Helen Falkenberg and Laura Seidler; her four children, Wayne Schaefer, Kathy Elsesser, Laura Abt and Beth Sager; seven grandchildren; fifteen great-grandchildren; and the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, Anthony and Isabelle, and her sister, Susan (Geibl).

By Marie Rose Van Deurzen, SSND

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