



**“God has told you what is good:
to do justice, to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God.”**

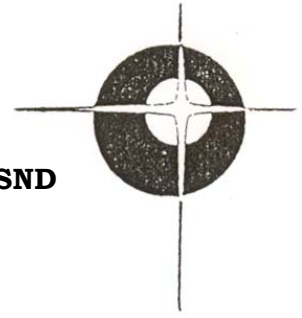
– Micah 6:8

SISTER BERNADETTE (M. BERNARDE) STARK, SSND

April 17, 1934

July 17, 1964

September 22, 2010



Our beloved Sister Bernadette (M. Bernarde) Stark, 76, died at her home in Oakdale, Minnesota, at 9:10 p.m. on Wednesday, September 22, 2010. She had lived with a cancer diagnosis since July 2009, experiencing several hospital stays and some periods of remission following treatment. She had entered Hospice and had come home for a final time the day previous to her death. Her sister, Pat Doolan, and Sister Judy Bakula were with her at the time of her death.

The funeral Mass for Sister Bernadette, with Father Bernard Steiner as presider, will be on Monday, September 27, at 10:30 a.m., in Good Counsel Chapel, Mankato, followed by cremation, with burial in our cemetery at a later date. Her vigil service will be at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 26. A memorial Mass will also be held on Tuesday, September 28, at Transfiguration Parish, Oakdale at 6:30 p.m. Loving sympathy to her sisters Pat Doolan, Mary Jo Stark and Michelle Stickney and her brother Francis, her nieces and nephews and their families, her former students and colleagues, her many great friends and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, Francis and Irene (Walsh) Stark, and her niece Maggi.

Sister Bernadette, the second of five children and the oldest girl, was born April 17, 1934, in St. Paul. She was baptized Bernadette Mary at Guardian Angels Church in Lake Elmo. She wrote about her name choice, and that of her three sisters, “Mother dedicated her four daughters to Our Lady. She also saw to it that each had Mary’s name.”

Bernadette attended St. John’s School in St. Paul for grades 1-4, with the Sisters of St. Joseph as her teachers. She met School Sisters of Notre Dame in this way: “The summer of my second grade, Mother decided she would like some music around the house, so my brother Fran and I started piano lessons at Sacred Heart School. Our teachers were Sister M. Davida and a Candidate, now known as Sister Mary Mark [Sister Mary Tacheny]. These lessons were to be the seed of my future life, only I didn’t know it at the time.”

In 1944 the family moved to another part of town and the Stark children attended Holy Spirit School, also under the direction of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Piano lessons continued as the children traveled by bus across town every week. Bernadette wrote about her early vocational calling, “It was when I was in fifth grade that I got the idea about being a sister. I would look at my teacher at school and then at my piano teacher. Through this I was sure of one thing, that if I ever became a sister it would have to be a School Sister of Notre Dame and with the name of Mary Bernarde as that was the name of St. Bernadette in religion.”

Bernadette’s first two years of high school were at St. Francis de Sales. There she met Sister Marlene Breimhorst, and the idea of becoming a sister again surfaced. She would daydream during class about becoming a sister, and commented, “There was always a ‘But’ butting in.” She then attended St. Agnes for her junior and senior years, where Sister Mary Alphonse Wachtler was principal. Bernadette was extremely proud to be an “Aggie.” She described her feelings on graduation day, “June 1st, 1952, was for me the happiest and saddest day. Sad because I was leaving the halls of St. Agnes. Happy because now I could meet the world with that Aggie spirit and put to use what the sisters had taught.”

Following graduation, she worked for a short time at a small advertising firm, and then in November 1952, began working at the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in the credit department. One of her colleagues there was the mother of Sister Joann McMahon, and Bernadette would sometimes accompany the McMahon's as they visited Joann in Rogers, MN. Bernadette stayed at the *Pioneer Press* for nine years. Her vocation story continued during that time: "What happened to that idea I had back in my school days? The Lord kept Sister Mary Alphonse busy working on it. How she ever knew I don't know for I never told anyone, not even my family. Sister would just drop hints all over the place, but I just kept right on saying, 'Not me, never!'" Following some union negotiating sessions, Bernadette again felt the call. She went to Mankato to talk things over with Sister Mary Alphonse, who suggested that she think things over and then ask for admission to SSND if that's what she decided. She entered the Postulate in September 1961, and was received into the novitiate in July 1962 with the name, Sister Mary Bernarde. However, after only two weeks, a sudden, severe illness forced her to leave the novitiate. She was able to re-enter the novitiate in July 1963, and professed first vows in 1964.

She spent the next year as a college student at Good Counsel, and then taught intermediate grades at St. Anne School, Wabasso, for three years. During the next several years, she served in a dual role of teacher and religious education director at John Ireland, St. Peter; St. Peter, Mendota; and St. John the Baptist, Jordan. She completed her bachelor's degree from Mount Mary College in 1973.

In 1975, Sister Bernadette began a 16-year period of service as religious education director, adult education coordinator and Befriender program leader at Transfiguration Parish in Oakdale. In recent years, she worked as an office manager for an insurance firm and volunteered at Carol Mathey's Center for Children and Families in Oakdale.

During this time, she also served SSND in a variety of ways, in particular, by reaching out to sisters in special need. She acted as driver for sisters who lived in Central Towers, taking them to doctors' appointments and grocery shopping. She didn't set time limits, but always commented that sisters should take "as long as you need." She became active in clown ministry and enjoyed interacting with others in this way. Known for her generosity, she would provide treats for sisters in Mankato, and loved to bring surprise gifts of candy which she put into sisters' lockers. She and others made quilts for each of the 40 Healthcare rooms in Notre Dame Hall in Mankato. She also had a special "telephone ministry" where she kept in touch with sisters living outside the province center, as well as a letter-writing ministry to sisters in Notre Dame Hall. She often attended enrichment sessions and parties for SSNDs at St. Mary's Home in St. Paul. She and her sister also had a special outreach to the poor.

In May, she wrote a letter to the sisters of the province, expressing her gratitude for their prayerful support during her illness. She wrote in part, "I am writing today to say a giant thank you for the prayers, visits, cards and phone calls these past ten months. . . My prayer each morning has always been, 'God, what do you have planned for me to do today?' Now that takes on new meaning. . . As I lay in the hospital, people and flowers kept coming and I realized people from around the world were letting me know that they cared. . . Words cannot express what that meant to me. . . Each day I realize more than ever the power of prayer. . . With this power on my side I am able to look at the gift of life JOY FILLED. I have much to be thankful for." She went on to say that even though at that time, there was no sign of cancer, the doctor did say it would return, and so she was asking for continued prayer. She closed by again thanking everyone for their care, prayers and love.

Sister Bernadette seemed to zero in on those in special need, fulfilling the theme of her liturgy – doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with her God. And now she doesn't need to ask God what's planned for her – she knows!