



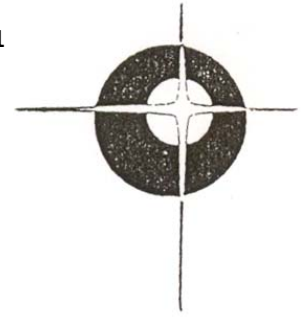
**“The Lord is my Light and my Salvation.” – Psalm 27:1**

**SISTER M. BRIGID HEFFERNAN, SSND**

February 26, 1921

July 17, 1941

November 19, 2009



Our beloved Sister M. Brigid Heffernan, 88, died peacefully at 1:35 p.m. on Thursday, November 19, 2009, at Good Counsel Provincial House, Mankato, Minnesota. Several sisters and a grandniece were present at the time of her death.

The funeral Mass for Sister M. Brigid, with Father Bernard Steiner as presider, will be on Monday, November 23, at 10:30 a.m., in our Good Counsel Chapel, followed by cremation. Burial in our cemetery will take place at a later date. The vigil service is at 7:00 p.m. on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. Loving sympathy to her sister, Elizabeth O'Connor, and sister-in-law, Phyllis Heffernan, nieces and nephews and their families, as well as her former students and colleagues, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, F. Edward and Mary L. (Flynn) Heffernan, sisters Mary Varley, Eileen Dock, Loretto Johnson, Margaret Winn, Veronica DeMarco, and Kathleen McSherry, and her brother Paul.

Patricia Brigid Heffernan, the fifth daughter, was born February 26, 1921, on a farm east of Northfield, Minnesota, and baptized a few weeks later at St. Dominic Church. Three more daughters and finally a son would join the Heffernan family in the years that followed. Describing her childhood, Sister Brigid wrote, “Recollections of my childhood are numerous but insignificant; the phrase ‘joys of childhood’ contains them all.” Later, in a brief Heffernan family history account, she noted her father’s philosophy, “If you have nothing but a handful of oatmeal, be sure to share it.’ Life for our family through the bitter Depression, the hardships on our family farm and the loving warm, happy years that evolved for all of us, gave meaning to Dad’s philosophy ...give of the little you got!”

Patricia attended district school for two years and then transferred to the newly-opened Holy Rosary School in Northfield. This was her first exposure to sisters, and she commented, “The only set notion I had of them was that they had always been sisters, just as I had always been a little girl. Maybe that accounts for my never planning on being one myself.” However, during times of severe winter, several Heffernan girls stayed at the convent when they were unable to get home. She commented about this, “The motherly care of the sisters during these times was but the first of their many kindnesses for which I will be eternally grateful.” In the summer of 1933, the family lost the farm and moved to town, an event that her father found very depressing, although he seldom spoke of it.

Receiving the sacrament of Confirmation in eighth grade awakened a desire in Patricia to “make Christ live for youth, to preach to them from the housetops.” She completed two years of high school at Holy Rosary, and two more at the public high school, graduating in 1938. She had plans to attend Carleton College in Northfield, but her plans changed, and during the summer she applied for and was accepted as a candidate for the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She gave Sister Sylvia Tembruell, one of her teachers, special recognition in her vocation choice. After two years in the candidature, on July 16, 1940, she was received into the Novitiate as Sister Mary Brigid. She professed First Vows on July 17, 1941.

Education was a strong Heffernan family value, with five of the children choosing teaching as a profession. Sister Brigid's initial inclination was to become a kindergarten teacher, but "the community leaders saw fit to prepare me for secondary education and provided me with a firm foundation for the work that lay ahead in teaching English and religion and in administration." She earned a BA in English and Science from St. Catherine's College in 1948, an MA in English and Education from Creighton in 1951, an MA Education Specialist/Administration from St. Thomas College in 1985, and ESL certification from Seattle University in 1993.

From 1941-1970, Sister Brigid taught upper grades and high school classes at several Minnesota schools: St. Agnes, St. Matthew, and St. Andrew, all in St. Paul; SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato; Lonsdale; Madelia; St. Michael; Wabasha; and Wabasso, where she also served as principal. In 1970, she was elected to the first "Provincial Team." She had also been a member of Provincial Chapters almost continuously from 1969-1983. Following her term on the Team, she taught Religious Education in Owatonna for three years. In 1976 she began the next chapter of her life – another round in secondary schools – Loyola, Mankato; St. Gertrude, Raleigh, ND; Trinity, Dickinson, ND; and St. Mary, New England, ND. For most of these years, she was principal in addition to teaching. She loved both roles, and wrote in 1993, "I enjoyed immensely the speech units that prepared young people to express themselves clearly and with conviction. It was exciting to direct young people and help them develop self-confidence... I always thought of my work as a principal as being head teacher, an extension of any teacher's responsibility to provide a climate in which both students and teachers could thrive as learners. It was a climate that I hope was marked by love and respect." Sister Brigid retired from formal education in 1992 when New England St. Mary's High School closed. New England had a special place in her heart, as she wrote in 2000, "This wonderful school...was in my estimation the most typically an SSND school. Rural in setting, owned and operated by the parish, it was served by SSNDs for 75 years." In 1991, St. Mary's parish and pastor gave Sister Brigid a very special Golden Jubilee gift – a nine-day tour of Ireland, her ancestral home.

After 51 years in formal education, Sister Brigid asked for a sabbatical of service to the poor with Sister Leanore Stanton in St. Paul. Commenting on this experience, she wrote, "For me, Sister Leanore epitomized our goal to live simply, to be with the materially poor and be evangelized by them, and to share lives and resources with them. And it was Leanore who exemplified for me a life which truly relied on God in prayer."

Her retirement years continued Sister Brigid's commitment to education as she taught ESL at McDonough Organization with Respect and Equality for People "School for Empowerment" (M.O.R.E.) and volunteered in the library at Guadalupe Area Project (GAP). In 2002 she moved to Good Counsel to live out her remaining years of retirement.

Family ties were very strong for Sister Brigid, whom family members called "Sister Pat." Following a family celebration of her 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, she warmly thanked all who attended in person and in spirit for making the day such a gift. Community life with her SSND sisters also held special meaning, as she described "We shared jokes, books we read. We sang and walked together. My hobbies of sewing and listening to music were shared. What a life!"

Throughout her life, Sister Brigid relied heavily on prayer, and looked to God, her Light and Salvation. May Sister Brigid, the life-long educator, now be experiencing that eternal light of God's presence.

Sister Mary Kay Ash