



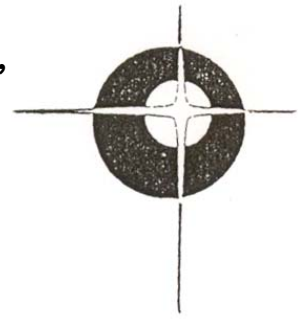
**“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”
--Phil 1:21**

SISTER MARY CAROL ILLA, SSND

November 4, 1923

July 21, 1946

November 5, 2008



About 10:45 p.m., on November 5, just one day after her 85th birthday, our beloved Sister Mary Carol Illa died peacefully at Good Counsel Provincial House. Sister Pauline Fritz was with her at the time of her death. Keenly interested in world happenings, Sister Mary Carol had watched part of the election results the night before her death.

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Carol, with Father Don Rauscher, SJ, as presider, will be on November 11 at 10:30 a.m. The vigil service is at 7:00 p.m. the preceding evening. Following cremation, burial will take place in our cemetery at a later date. Loving sympathy to her sister-in-law Mary Ann, nieces and nephews, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, as well as friends, colleagues and former students. She was preceded in death by her parents Michael and Catherine (Gerlach) Illa, brothers Edward and Francis, and sisters Madeline Kieffer and Sister Francis Marie Illa, SSND.

Sister Mary Carol, the fourth of five children, was born November 4, 1923, on a Dakota County farm near Miesville, Minnesota. She was baptized one week later at St. Joseph Church in Miesville and given the name Irene Helena. Her father ran a “diversified farm that included grain, hay, horses, cows, pigs, chickens, a dog and cats.” Her mother took care of the home and family and was a self-taught seamstress who designed her own patterns and altered clothes with ease.

In a 2008 autobiography, Sister Mary Carol wrote at length about her early years and emphasized the strong faith foundation provided by her family life. After listing the many church services attended and family devotions, she added, “I can truly say that a deep faith was alive in my nurturing family where I was much loved.” She also commented, “Ours was a family that worked together, prayed together and enjoyed relaxing and fun times together.” Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins lived close by, so a strong bond developed among extended family members.

At the age of six, Irene’s education began in a one-room district school about one and one-half miles from the farm. She reminisced about these days, “Fortunately, not every grade was represented each year, which alleviated the challenges of the one teacher in charge. I believe we learned much from each other. Speaking for myself, I was eager to learn and always did my homework.” Sometimes the family walked to school; other times they used a pony-drawn wagon or cutter, boarding the pony in a cousin’s barn during the school day.

Irene did not have the privilege of attending Catholic School. However, School Sisters of Notre Dame came to the parish in summer to conduct religious education classes. She writes of her first encounter with Sisters: “It was in my fifth summer that I made my first acquaintance with the sisters. They won my love and esteem from the beginning. To us who so seldom had the privilege of being instructed by these women of God, they seemed like angels far above us. Their gentle manner and loving service captivated our young hearts.”

After completing 8th grade, Irene attended Hastings High School and graduated in 1942. She spent the year after graduation at home, and thought about joining the WAACs or the WAVEs. Her younger sister Teresa (Sister Francis Marie) was a sophomore aspirant at Good Counsel Academy that year, and during family visits Irene met Sister Agnesine Obinger, the aspirants’ directress, “a very insightful SSND, who sparked in me the

attraction to religious life. She kept up a correspondence that helped me decide that SSND was for me.”

Irene and Teresa entered the candidature together in 1943 after Teresa’s graduation from Good Counsel. As a second year candidate, Irene taught Grades 1 and 2 at Assumption in St. Paul. She became a novice on July 20, 1945, receiving the name Sister Mary Carol.

Following profession of vows in 1946 she began her 50-year ministry of elementary teaching. She taught primary, middle and upper grades, and also served as administrator along the way. Minnesota schools that benefitted from her dedication to education included St. Stanislaus and Holy Childhood, St. Paul; St. Stanislaus, Winona; St. Philip, Minneapolis; St. Mathias, Hampton; Crucifixion, LaCrescent; John Ireland, St. Peter; and Providence, So. St. Paul. She twice served at St. Mary’s in New England, ND, and was there when the school closed in 1993. She concluded her years in education as a religious education teacher in the Baker, Montana, area from 1993-96. She earned a bachelor’s degree from the College of St. Teresa in Winona, and spent several summers doing post-graduate work at Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee.

Two special travel experiences provided Sister Mary Carol with many memories. In 1985 her 6th-8th grade teacher in Miesville gifted her with a Marian-Eucharistic pilgrimage that included visits to Marian shrines and the Eucharistic Congress in Nairobi, Kenya. The pilgrimage group traveled first to Fatima, Portugal, and was present for an August 13th candlelight procession at the shrine. They then spent seven days in Nairobi, where one of the presenters was Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

In 1987, Sister Mary Carol participated in the SSND spiritual renewal summer in Rome and Germany. She called this “the most exciting memorable experience that ever happened to me.” In addition to the program’s time in Rome and Germany, she and Sisters Francis Marie, Alene Kuhn and Josel’ Zender traveled to the area of France where Blessed Alix LeClerc and St. Peter Fourier lived and where they founded the Canonesses of Notre Dame. (The Canonesses were the teachers of Caroline Gerhardinger, who founded the School Sisters of Notre Dame.)

In 1996, Sister Mary Carol moved to Good Counsel, where she continued sharing her educational talents as a Learning Center tutor for ten years. She wrote in 1999, “Since I live in a provincial house which has 150 sisters in residence, I have other volunteer involvements besides my Learning Center ministry. The many activities that take place daily welcome the assistance of volunteers.” She also became adept at using e-mail to correspond with family and friends and to state her views on various political and social issues.

Sister Mary Carol was diagnosed with pancreatic and lung cancer in fall 2007. She wrote at that time, “After all the pros and cons, I have opted for no chemotherapy. I would rather live with some quality of life until God calls me to my eternal home. God knows when that will be and in the meantime, I will live in faith and love each day, trusting in your continued prayer.” When she entered hospice in August 2008, this was her message, “...Your expressions of compassionate concern and prayers have been much appreciated during this past year as you walked with me in this cancer journey.” She concluded her autobiography, “It is with a faithful God that I made a commitment. God has given me so much through family, friends, my religious community, and the parishes where I have ministered. It is with much gratitude that I look back upon the ups and downs of the past 62 years as a School Sister of Notre Dame.”

May Sister Mary Carol now be enjoying the fullness of God’s presence, after her long life of serving the people of God as sister, educator, family member and friend.

Sister Mary Kay Ash