



**“Shepherd Me, O God.”**

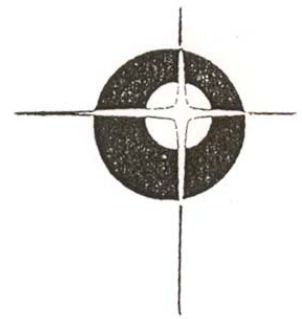
– Psalm 23

**SISTER ELAINE (M. PIERRE) GUERBER, SSND**

September 4, 1917

July 22, 1938

October 30, 2010



Our beloved Sister Elaine (M. Pierre) Guerber, 93, died peacefully at Good Counsel Provincial House, Mankato, at 3:55 a.m. on Saturday, October 30, 2010. After a fall a few weeks ago, her condition declined rapidly. Sister Jana Roberts was with her at the time of her death, providing the companionship that Sister Elaine had often provided for sisters who were close to death.

The funeral liturgy for Sister Elaine, with Father Andrew Olsem, her colleague from Worthington as presider, will be at 10:30 a.m., Wednesday, November 3, in Good Counsel Chapel, Mankato, followed by burial in our cemetery. Her vigil service will be at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 2. Loving sympathy to her sister, Lorraine Allen, and her brother, Edmund (Mary Anne), her nieces and nephews and their families, her former students and colleagues, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Sister Elaine was preceded in death by her parents, Mark and Blanche (Dunn); sisters, Madeline Guerber and Veronica Murphy; and brothers, Marcus, Stephen and Donald.

Sister Elaine, the third child and second daughter, was born September 4, 1917, on the family farm west of Blue Earth, Minnesota. A week later she was baptized Catherine Elaine at SS. Peter & Paul Church in Blue Earth. When she was about five, her entire family contracted scarlet fever, and a younger brother and sister died. In her autobiography, she wrote, “My little sister and I were sick in the same room. Waking one morning and finding her gone, I inquired about her. However, no one heeded my plea. Finally after this pleading had gone on for some time, they told me that the angels had taken both my little brother and her to heaven the previous day.”

Elaine attended public school about two miles from her home because there was no Catholic school in Blue Earth. Her parents taught her prayers and the fundamental truths of the Catholic faith at an early age. She also attended weekly classes at the parish, receiving her First Communion in 1924 and the sacrament of Confirmation in 1929.

Following eighth grade, Elaine thought she would attend the public high school with her brother. Her parents had other plans, as she described, “Mother and Dad did not consult me on this matter. They had long decided that Good Counsel Academy was the only place for me, as my older sister had spent three previous years there. Oh, how I protested! Finally as September came along, I was just taken to Good Counsel along with my sister without my acquiescence. After a year of boarding school life I had to admit that it was the only place for me.”

She credited the director of boarders, Sister Benigna Michel, for sparking her vocation to SSND. During high school, Elaine had little interest in being a sister and thought that, if she would ever change her mind, “Notre Dames were out of the question because . . . they were altogether too strict.” At the beginning of Christmas vacation of her senior year, Elaine asked Sister Benigna how she could stand it when everyone left for home. Sister Benigna’s comment, “Nothing is hard, Elaine, when you do it for the Lord,” impressed Elaine. She continued in her autobiography, “This was the beginning of many things. I pondered over these words. Yes, I even prayed over them. Finally, with the grace of God, I made my great decision. I would be a nun, but not a Notre Dame.” However, by her graduation day, she had decided that she would come back to Good Counsel as an SSND candidate. Her mother at first objected, but later gave her consent, and her dad’s one remark was, “Remember, it’s for life.”

Elaine entered SSND in 1935. She took college classes, and taught music and assisted with other classes at St. Paul School, Comfrey, the next year. At her reception into the novitiate in 1937, she was given the name Sister M. Pierre; later she returned to her baptismal name.

Following first profession in 1938, Sister Elaine began her SSND ministry as an upper grade teacher and musician at St. Michael School, St. Michael for eight years. Even in recent years, her former St. Michael students still came to Good Counsel to visit. During the 1946-47 school year, she taught seventh and eighth grades and conducted the children's choir at Assumption School, St. Paul. Her next four years were at St. Nicholas, New Market, where in her own words, "I was asked to be superior and principal and I also had 6-7-8 grades plus music pupils." She then taught at Good Counsel Academy and served as director of Aspirants (1951-59). In this capacity, she came to know well many young women who would become School Sisters of Notre Dame. She then became principal of St. Peter Grade and High School in New Haven, Iowa (1959-65). She also had church music and taught in both schools. She spent one year in New England, North Dakota, in the same roles as New Haven. From 1966 to 1968, she shared her educational talents with Loyola High School, Mankato, as assistant principal and English teacher.

In 1968, the New Ulm Diocese opened an education office, and Sister Elaine became supervisor of schools in the diocese for the next two years. She served in the same capacity for the Bismarck Diocese (1970-72). The next three years she ministered as an educational consultant for the province. At St. Mary, Worthington (1975-78), she worked both as a religious educator and teacher in the parish and school. She returned to the New Ulm Diocese as educational consultant (1978-80).

In August 1980, Sister Elaine embarked on a very special type of community service – care of her very good friend and cancer victim, Sister Candace Nuese, in Lawton, Oklahoma, where Sister Candace had been ministering for a number of years. When both of them returned to Mankato in March 1981, Sister Elaine continued to give community service at Good Counsel. From the fall of 1981 through 1985, she again answered the call of education, serving as principal and teacher at St. Mary, Madelia.

Sister Elaine's concern for those in special need was demonstrated in her service in parish ministry at SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato from 1985 until 1990. She worked with an ecumenical group of 25-30 mentally and physically challenged persons, and developed a curriculum to help meet their needs. She also facilitated grief-support groups in the parish and worked with children of separated and divorced parents, both in the parish and in the elementary school. She found it very rewarding to help children realize that they were not at fault for their parents' separation.

Two years of pastoral ministry at Good Counsel followed. From 1992 through 1995, she served as librarian at St. Mary School, Worthington, and did some parish visiting also. Her long commitment to education ended with ten years as a tutor in the Good Counsel Learning Center (1995-2005). Until recently, she gave pastoral ministry service to the sisters in health care.

Throughout her SSND life, she had a deep interest in spirituality, and was a vital part in the summer House of Prayer in St. Michael in the 1970s and the Center for Spiritual Development. She also served as a spiritual director. The depth of her sharing stands out for several sisters. She was a prayerful presence for sisters at the time of their death. She was known, too, for her love of good conversation and a good cup of coffee.

Very devoted to her family, and they to her, she looked forward to visits with them. She often expressed her gratitude that she had another day to live. In her retirement, her ministry was to participate in any and all activities, especially those of a spiritual nature.

"Shepherd me, O God" is her theme, and Sister Elaine followed her Shepherd throughout her life. She dwells now in the house of her God forevermore!

Sister Mary Kay Ash