



“Come my beloved, my lovely one, come.”
– Song of Songs 2:10



SISTER JOSEPH MARIE KASEL, SSND

September 8, 1923

July 22, 1945

December 13, 2011

Our beloved Sister Joseph Marie Kasel, 88, died peacefully at 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, December 13, 2011, in Notre Dame Health Care, Good Counsel Hill, Mankato, Minnesota. Sisters Paula Young, Jana Roberts and Anna Louise Kemen were with her when she died. She had told others that she would be “home” for Christmas – and her prediction proved to be accurate.

The funeral Mass for Sister Joseph Marie, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, will be Friday, December 16, at 10:30 a.m., in Good Counsel Chapel. The vigil service will be at 7:00 p.m. on December 15. Because Sister Joseph Marie had requested that her body be cremated immediately after death, her cremains will be buried in our cemetery following the Mass on Friday. Loving sympathy to her brother-in-law Abdul Bahrani; her nieces and nephews and their families; her former students and colleagues; and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, Theodore and Elizabeth (Stroth) Kasel, her twin brother Father Joseph, her brothers Leo, Ray, Ralph, Robert and John, and her sisters Marge Bahrani and Midge Hoffman.

On September 8, 1923, a third consecutive set of twins was born into the Kasel family in St. Paul with Joseph preceding Mary by about 10 minutes. Looking back on her early childhood, Sister Joseph Marie called herself a convert; she was 2½ when she was baptized, along with her mother and the rest of the Kasel children. She wrote, “The story of my mother’s conversion will always be a mystery. Neither of my parents ever discussed it in our presence.”

In 1929, Mary started first grade at St. Francis de Sales School, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. An article in the February 18, 2000, issue of *Catholic East Texas* (Diocese of Tyler) described her impression of school, “As far back as she can remember, she has always wanted to be a teacher. And because of the example of the women who taught her, she also knew that she wanted to be not only a nun, but a School Sister of Notre Dame. ‘What I saw in them was a real sense of joy about their lives and about their vocations. They challenged us as kids to be the best that we could be, to be creative and innovative, to use the gifts that each one of us is given. Overall, though, it was the sense of the presence of God. You knew these women knew God. There was a sense of holiness. . . .”

The desire to be a School Sister of Notre Dame led Mary to the Aspiranture in Mankato, where she spent four happy years. After graduation in 1942, she faced a crisis: “For the first time I truly realized that being an SSND did not assure me of working with the Mexicans at Guadalupe. My summers had been spent there . . . and I couldn’t figure out how I could be an SSND and still spend summers there. . . . My final choice was to enter SSND and hope for an opportunity to work with Mexican children.” She became a candidate in August 1942, and the next year taught first grade at St. Stanislaus School, Winona. On her Reception day in 1944, her religious name, Sister Joseph Marie, was based on her twin brother’s name. (Later, she and many of her colleagues shortened it to “Sister Jo.”)

Following first profession in 1945, Sister Joseph Marie began her life-long ministry as an educator. She taught a variety of grades at St. Mary, Shakopee (1945-51); Assumption, Cresco, IA (1951-54); St. Agnes, St. Paul (1954-56); St. Bartholomew, Wayzata (1956-59) and SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato (1959-63). During this time, she earned a BA from St. Catherine’s College. She spent the 1963-64 school year at St. Louis University, finishing work on her MA degree in Administration/Supervision. In 1964 she also became certified as a Doman-Delacato neurological reading consultant. In 1964 she became principal at St. Joseph School, Cresco, a ministry that lasted one year. A 1996 article from the Tyler diocesan paper summarized her time in the classroom: “Sister Jo began her career as a teacher of primary grades. ‘I thought it was nirvana,’ she said. Later she taught middle grades and moved into administration. ‘I found

that is nirvana for me, too. . . . We are all learners.” Evidencing that statement, she earned over 30 postgraduate credits along with certification through the Ketterling Foundation’s Individually Guided Education (IGE) Program.

Sister Joseph Marie’s role in education changed in 1965 when she was appointed supervisor of schools for the Mankato Province, a position she held until 1976. As supervisor, and in her later positions as superintendent, she was very much a mentor for teachers and principals. She offered to teach classroom lessons, often in the language arts field, which was an area of great expertise for her, and allowed the teacher to observe. In addition to her province position, she became the associate superintendent of the Dubuque Archdiocesan schools in 1971. During this time she was instrumental in establishing the IGE program in some of the Dubuque schools.

1976 marked the beginning of over twenty years of diocesan service for Sister Joseph Marie. She served as the diocesan superintendent of schools in Winona (1976-82); Spokane (1982-88); Colorado Springs (1988-95); and Tyler, Texas (1996-2000). Throughout her superintendent tenure, her goal was the same: “To focus on the Catholic character, the heritage and the identity of the diocesan Catholic school system so that what we do as educators is different from what happens in public schools. . . . Our focus will be to take the Gospel values of Jesus and to see that those are integrated within the total curriculum so that religion for us is not just a subject to be taught, but a way of life. . .” She believed that principals and teachers were “ministers within our Catholic schools, which really made them evangelizers.”

Sister Joseph Marie embraced the challenges of all of her diocesan positions, confident in her ability to make a difference in Catholic education. In Spokane, she hoped to inspire “countercultural schools which display Catholic ideals and commitment so strongly that the students help to shape the peaceful just society everybody talks about.” In 1996, following a sabbatical year, she was looking for a diocese that was considered mission. Tyler easily fit that description, and in her four years there, Sister Joseph Marie’s enthusiasm for Catholic education was very evident. She pointed out “the true sense of community among the schools, and the strong sense of the importance of our Catholic identity as schools” that developed during her time in Tyler.

As an educator on the diocesan level, Sister Joseph Marie had several opportunities to be both teacher and student. She worked with many advisory boards in varying capacities and presented workshops on a variety of topics. In 1993 as a member of a National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) delegation, she spent 12 days in Russia and Lithuania visiting schools and talking with educators. She also visited schools in Mexico City and Puerto Rico.

Sister Joseph Marie was intensely proud of SSND. She was quoted in a 2000 article, “I really like being a nun, and I like being a School Sister of Notre Dame. And when I’ve attended meetings where we are gathered together from all over the world, what I get, and what energizes me, is this very real, very strong sense of ‘We’re glad to be SSNDs.’ And that’s always been an attraction to me.” She also commented in the same article, “I am a woman religious in a leadership position, with the emphasis on *woman*. I think that’s crucial. I believe women have a vital role to play in the growth of the church, and I believe women have much to contribute to the development of the church.”

Beyond her many educational experiences, Sister Joseph Marie will be remembered for her deep faith, her strong devotion to the Eucharist, and her love for her family and friends. Upon learning of her request for prayer during her final days, a friend wrote to Sister Joseph Marie, “Thank you for the enduring and faithful – if quiet – support and presence you have been in my life.” This sentiment is echoed by many.

“Come my beloved, my lovely one, come!” Sister Joseph Marie listened and responded to this summons for over 88 years. May she now experience everlasting joy in her final response to the call, “Come!” by celebrating an eternal Christmas at home with God!