



**“My love is mine and I am His.”**  
– Song of Songs 2:16a

**SISTER KATHERINE (M. DANITA) MATTERN, SSND**

December 8, 1934  
July 21, 1954  
August 11, 2010



Our beloved Sister Katherine (M. Danita) Mattern, 75, died in ISJ Hospital in Mankato, Minnesota, at 12:10 a.m. on Wednesday, August 11, 2010, of complications following surgery on August 1. Sister Kathryn Schoolmeesters was with her, praying the prayers for the dying. In the days preceding her death, Sister Katherine often was heard praying the St. Patrick's Breastplate Prayer, the Anima Christi and the prayer of St. Ignatius. She was comforted, too, as she received the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

The funeral Mass for Sister Katherine, with Father Ted Hottinger, SJ, as presider, will be on Monday, August 16, at 10:30 a.m., in Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial in our cemetery. The vigil service will be at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, August 15. Loving sympathy to her sisters Viola (Cyl) Schumacher, Marianna Dosch, Bernice (George) Simek, and Lillian (Joe) Aberle, and her brothers Franklin (Janet), Daniel (Becky) and Henry (Julie), 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, Peter and Elizabeth (Schumacher) Mattern.

Sister Katherine, the fourth of eight children, was born December 8, 1934, in Strasburg, ND and baptized the next day at SS. Peter and Paul Church. In a biographical sketch prepared for one of the parishes where she ministered, she wrote a very descriptive introduction to her life: “Beautiful North Dakota, the land of rolling plains, long range vision, wide horizons, glorious sunrises and sunsets, and zillions of stars ‘winking’ at you in the night – this awesome state is where I originated. A small plot of land about 3½ miles south of Strasburg (‘Home of Lawrence Welk’ and fellow band member with my dad for 11 years) became home...” She added more about her home life, “We never had a lot of money, but we were happy and well cared for. We were taught to love and respect nature, as well as the God who provided our every need.”

One of the Word and Communion Service reflections given by Sister Katherine provided insight to her vocation story. She shared the following, “As a small child, I was dead set on becoming a priest. One day when I was about 6, my dad told me that I could not be a priest because I was a girl and only boys could become priests. This broke my heart as I blurted out between sobs, ‘Well what can I be then?’ He told me about those happy, smiling ladies dressed in black, called ‘Sisters,’ who teach little children about God, like our priest teaches big people. That was enough for me. From then on, I was going to be a ‘Sister.’”

She attended the local country school through seventh grade, and was able to go to the Catholic school in town for 8<sup>th</sup> grade. After a year of high school in Strasburg, her parents gave permission to leave home and finish school as an aspirant at Good Counsel. She wrote about this experience, “I was so excited to travel to Mankato, up the long winding road to Good Counsel Hill – a Girls’ Academy. Little did I realize till after Mom and Dad were gone how very far 600 miles away from home could stretch out to be. I think, perhaps, several acres of Minnesota cornfields could have been well irrigated with my tears those first few months.”

After high school graduation in 1952, she entered the SSND Candidature, and was received as a novice in 1953. Her religious name, Danita, was based on her brother Daniel’s name. (She later returned to her baptismal name.) Writing about her religious life, she commented,

“The happiest day of my life was Final Profession (1960) – my permanent commitment to God by living out the three vows: Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.”

She spent the first twenty years of her SSND ministry as a primary grade teacher at St. Wenceslaus, Dickinson, ND; Sacred Heart, Eden, SD; Sacred Heart, Heron Lake, MN; St. Mark, Shakopee, MN; and St. Mary, New England, ND. She described her role as a care-taking teacher, “Never did I dream that there could be so many runny little noses that needed wiping, and shoes that only I knew how to tie!” While she was teaching in Dickinson, her mother was killed in an automobile accident that also injured her younger brothers. One of the sisters who helped her through this very difficult time was Sister Eleanore Zeren, and a life-long friendship followed.

Following her years as a teacher, she spent several years in pastoral ministry at St. Mary, Bismarck, and St. Joseph, Dickinson. From 1985-91, she served as a field advocate on the Bismarck Diocese marriage tribunal. She was known for thorough work on the tribunal, and in many instances developed solid relationships with those for whom she advocated. They often invited her to family events such as baptisms and first communions.

As her ministry experience evolved, she began classes in Clinical Pastoral Experience (CPE), completing seven units of study and practice in Des Moines, IA. With that background, she became pastoral minister at Our Lady of Victory in Fergus Falls in 1996. At that time, she wrote, “I thank God for letting me become a part of your lives, and you a part of mine. You are, each one, God’s special creation! With a parish name like “Our Lady of Victory”, we cannot help but win, right?”

Several times in her years of ministry, serious illness often including surgery interrupted her service, and she needed months of recuperation to regain her strength. This was the case after one year in Fergus Falls and again after about two years as Coordinator of Volunteers at St. Michael Parish, St. Michael, MN.

In 2002, Sister Katherine became activities director for the sisters in healthcare on Good Counsel Hill. She found many creative ways to involve sisters in various activities during her four years in that position. About that same time, she began sharing her spirituality with all the sisters on the Hill as one of the Saturday Word and Communion Service ministers. Her reflections during those services show a deep spirituality and a special devotion to Mary, which she credited to her father.

Until the time of her death, Sister Katherine’s Call to Service was “Community Service,” and this she did in so many ways, both on and off the Hill. She particularly enjoyed being a Eucharistic minister at the hospital. In 2007, she enthusiastically joined the province-sponsored mission trip to New Orleans, and spent several days gutting flood-damaged houses with Sisters and lay staff much younger than she. Anticipating this experience, she wrote to family and friends, “I feel that this is definitely a spiritual encounter for me. Deep within, I feel the Spirit calling me to New Orleans as a preparation for another ‘task’ He has ‘up His sleeve’ for me, somewhere down the road.”

Known for her sense of humor and friendliness to all, she dressed as a clown both for the Hill talent show on July 4<sup>th</sup> and the SSND Ice Cream Social a week later, where she directed the children’s activities. Those who received written greetings from her also received the gift of her deep spirituality in the enclosed messages. She looked forward to yearly trips to visit her family in North Dakota.

One of her Word and Communion reflections quoted her morning offering, which in part prays, “God of love, be present to me... knit my soul to Thee; Let Thy love possess my whole being...” May Sister Katherine, now present to her God of love, fully realize the joy of God’s love possessing her whole being.”

Sister Mary Kay Ash