



**“I will praise you, Lord, all my days.” – Psalm 146:2**

**SISTER M. LILLIAN NOHAVA, SSND**

December 18, 1918

July 22, 1940

March 24, 2010



In this, her 70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee year, our beloved Sister M. Lillian Nohava, 91, died peacefully at 5:49 p.m. on Wednesday, March 24, 2010, at Good Counsel Provincial House, Mankato, Minnesota. Although she had been in declining health for some time, her death was unexpected.

The funeral Mass for Sister M. Lillian, with Father Bernard Steiner as presider, will be on Monday, March 29, 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 March 28. Loving sympathy to her twin sister, Sister Rosemary Nohava, SSND, her older sister, Sister Yvonne Nohava, SSND, who so lovingly cared for Sister Lillian these past years, and her sisters Magdalen Nohava, Julia (Roy) Washa and Theresa Zitzow, her sister-in-law Clara Nohava, 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, Frank and Mary (Jirik) Nohava, her stepmother Mary (Malecha) Nohava, her sisters Agnes Hincks, Josephine Mamer, Catherine Frank, and Leona Tupa, and her brothers William, John (who died at age 14), Francis (who died as an infant), Francis and Johnny.

The 1918 Christmas season brought a double gift to the Nohava family in Lonsdale, Minnesota, as identical twins Rose (our future Sister Lillian) and Mary (our future Sister Rosemary) were born on December 18. Four sisters and two brothers welcomed the twins to the family. Due to uncertainty about their health, they were baptized the next day at home on the oven door. (Because of their small size, the twins were wrapped in cotton and kept in a box on the stove as an incubator.) Sister Lillian wrote of their early days in her autobiography, “The question immediately arose: ‘How shall we tell them apart?’ We were identical. The only difference was in the weight. My sister who was older by fifteen minutes was also a half pound heavier, which of course in later life often gave her a good excuse for being my superior. The difficulty was finally settled when my mother tied a blue ribbon on my sister’s finger and a red ribbon on my finger. We wore the ribbons until it was discovered that I possessed something which my sister did not – a small birthmark...”

When the twins were about 18 months old, another child, Francis, was born, but their mother died one week later. Two weeks later, Francis also died. Their father, a hardware dealer whose store was next to the family home, resolved to keep the family together if at all possible. The children’s grandmother helped tremendously, and Sister Lillian wrote of her, “It was she who taught us how to speak our first words and whisper our first prayers.” Their father remarried when the twins were four, giving the family “another mother, one who filled perfectly the place of my own dear mother. It was a very happy day for us.”

Rose and her sister Mary started school at the Catholic school a block from their home, with School Sisters of Notre Dame as their teachers. She attended eight elementary grades and two years of high school there, so she became well acquainted with the sisters. “In fact,” she wrote, “I practically lived with them, helping after school hours, helping with church work, running errands, so that it is no wonder that a vocation to this same life was fostered.” During these school years, she received the sacraments of Confession, Holy Communion and Confirmation, all happy events in her life.

Rose continued her vocation story, “It was in my freshman year that I first realized that I had a vocation to the religious life, which I owe to the good example of my high school

teacher.” After completing 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Lonsdale, Rose and Mary registered at Good Counsel in 1935, leaving home to become boarders just two weeks after their older sister Lillian (Sister M. Yvonne) entered the candidature at Good Counsel. On her graduation day, Rose made up her mind to enter the candidature in fall. She found it especially hard to tell her twin because this would be the first time in their lives that they would be separated.

Rose entered the candidature in August 1937, spending the first year in college classes and her second year teaching second graders at St. Agnes in St. Paul. At her reception into the novitiate, she was given the name of her older sister, Lillian. Preparing for profession, Novice Lillian was unaware that her twin had also decided to enter the candidature. It was arranged that Mary would enter just before her sister’s profession as a surprise profession gift. However, three days before profession, Sister Lillian discovered the secret – one of the happiest moments of her life. (And it was at Sister Rosemary’s Final Vows that their father revealed the fulfillment of their mother’s dying wish – *that her three youngest daughters would become sisters.*)

Following her 1940 profession, Sister Lillian began her ministry of teaching at SS. Peter & Paul, New Hradec, ND. In the fall of 1943, she and another sister went to the train depot to meet the new first and second grade teacher, whose identity was not known to them. Sister Lillian wrote about that day, “To my total and unexpected surprise, the new teacher was Sister Rosemary, my twin sister. After being separated for six years we were given the happiness of living together again.” Sister Lillian stayed at New Hradec until 1949. She continued her middle and upper grade teaching, at times combined with administration, in several schools, including St. Stanislaus, St. Paul; St. Isidore, Litomysl, MN; St. Stanislaus, Winona, MN; Guardian Angel, Colton, WA; Trinity, Spokane, WA; St. John, Mankato; St. Anthony, Lismore, MN; Immaculate Conception, Gilbertville, IA; St. Michael, St. Michael, MN; and SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato. During this time she earned a B.A. from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, and an M.A. in reading from St. Thomas College in St. Paul.

Sister Lillian earned recognition in several areas in her teaching ministry. In 1974 while at Gilbertville, she was given the National Teacher Award by the Freedom Foundation in Valley Forge, PA. Her sixth grade students were selected by the National School Awards Jury to receive the George Washington Certificate for outstanding accomplishment in the 1973-74 School Awards Program. At that time, she commented, “Building a good self-image in each child so that he may grow in good citizenship knowing that there is a place for him in the world of the future is my goal.” In 1975 she was named an Outstanding Elementary Teacher of America. While teaching Vacation School in Washington State she was given the honor of pulling the switch to turn on the lights on Grand Coulee Dam. From 10 p.m.-midnight colored lights shine on the Columbia River cascade, and the ceremony of “turning on the lights” was reserved for dignitaries. The local Coulee Dam pastor considered Sister Lillian very much of a dignitary. In 1964 Sisters Lillian and Rosemary were featured in a *St. Paul Pioneer Press* article as they studied for their master’s degrees in reading. The article noted that even their glasses had the same visual correction.

At the conclusion of Sister Lillian’s teaching ministry in 1989 at SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato, she stayed two more years in the parish doing pastoral ministry and sacristy work. In 1991, she moved to Good Counsel Hill, where she continued her educational ministry as a Learning Center tutor for several years. In the 1950’s, Sister Lillian taught crafts during the summer at the Catholic Youth Center in St. Paul; in her retirement years, she continued sharing this talent by working in the craft room on the Hill.

Throughout her 91 years, Sister Lillian, an identical twin, yet very much an individual, praised God often for her many blessings. May she now be celebrating her Jubilee perpetually as she sings God’s praises all the days of her eternal life.