



“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”

– Jeremiah 31:3

SISTER MARIE THERESE SIMONES, SSND

August 1, 1921

July 22, 1945

November 26, 2011



Our beloved Sister Marie Therese Simones, 90, died peacefully at 1:35 a.m., Saturday, November 26, 2011, in Notre Dame Health Care Center, Good Counsel Campus, Mankato, Minnesota. Her sister, Sister Jacinta Simones, was with her when she died. Sister Marie Therese had lived with a cancer diagnosis since mid-summer.

The funeral Mass for Sister Marie Therese, with Father Andrew Olsem as presider, will be on Friday, December 2, 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 December 1. Loving sympathy to Sister Jacinta, and to her sister-in-law, Rita Simones, 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 Jacob and Caroline (Zeller) Simones, her brothers LeRoy, Roland and Kenneth, and her sisters Marie Ring, Lucille Wojnar, Carol Pieniondz and Gladys Dawson.

Sister Marie Therese, the seventh of nine children, was born August 1, 1921, in Credit River Township near Lakeville, Minnesota. She received the name Anna Bernice at her baptism at All Saints Church, Lakeville, and was called Bernice by her family and friends. When she was three, the family moved to a larger farm near Lakeville. In her autobiography, Sister Marie Therese wrote: “We had a happy family life. We worked hard on the farm, but had many fun times as well. Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July and family picnics are days of fond memories. Several members of the family played piano and musical instruments; my dad was a fiddler.”

Bernice attended Lakeville Public School through grade eight. The Lakeville pastor conducted religious education classes after school on Thursdays and Fridays. Bernice enjoyed these classes, which continued until she was confirmed in 1933. Because of her mother’s poor health, and the fact that her three older sisters were no longer at home, Bernice left school at the age of thirteen to help out at home. She remained at home until she was twenty-one. She felt God’s call to be a sister, but didn’t know any sisters very well. She wrote, “Our pastor, Father James Byrnes, who had been superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese, convinced me to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Mankato. It was very difficult to leave my loving home, but God’s call was strong enough to grace me into entering this very strict order.” She entered the candidature in 1942 and was received into the novitiate in 1944 when she was given the name Marie Therese, “a name I love and cherish.”

When she entered the candidature, Sister Marie Therese wanted to be a teacher, but because she had not attended high school, this was not possible. She commented, “The next several years I served as a House Sister. I found much happiness in my work. I realized that cooking could be a very creative experience.” After profession in 1945, she assisted in the guests’ and priests’ department and the sisters’ dining room at Good Counsel for one year. In 1946 she was transferred to St. Matthew, St. Paul, where she remained until Christmas. She spent the next three years at St. Mary’s Catechetical School in Worthington, taking charge of the kitchen and helping to catechize. During her years at Worthington, she experienced the great sorrow of her

sister Gladys' death at the age of twenty-three, and the great joy of her sister Ellen's entrance into the SSND candidature.

Between the years 1950 and 1955, Sister Marie Therese ministered as a home service sister at Crucifixion, LaCrescent; Blessed Sacrament, Waterloo; and St. Adalbert, Silver Lake. She recounted her transition to primary teaching in this way: "In January 1955, a sister had surgery and needed time to recuperate. Mother Bernardia said my sister, Sister Jacinta, was a very good teacher so she thought that I would do all right for a short time. Needless to say, the few weeks stretched out into thirty-plus years teaching primary grades. I loved children, so I enjoyed every minute of it. For the next twenty-plus years I taught and studied, studied and taught the year round. In 1969, I was given a year off to attend Mount Mary College in Milwaukee where I completed my studies. Finally I had my high school diploma, my college diploma, and my state teacher's license in my possession. That was a big day of celebration for me." The following Minnesota schools benefitted from Sister Marie Therese's teaching ministry: St. Casimir, Winona (1955-56); SS. Peter & Paul, Mankato (1956-60); St. Matthew, St. Paul (1960-69); St. John, Savage (1970-71); Epiphany, Coon Rapids (1971-73); Shakopee Area Catholic School (1973-1981); and St. Mary, Help of Christians, St. Augusta (1981-85). During these years she was often involved in the sacramental programs for Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In 1985, Sister Marie Therese retired from teaching and began ministering to the elderly in the St. Cloud area. She worked with Stearns County Social Services, going into homes of the elderly and caring for them in whatever way she could. She also worked part-time as a priest's housekeeper at St. Peter Parish in St. Cloud until 1997. She spent the 1997 and 1998 school years recuperating and giving community service at Good Counsel. In 1999, she moved to St. Francis de Sales, St. Paul, where she worked with infants up to nine months old in Sandcastle Day Care. She described her next ministry in this way, "After two years, at the urgent request of the principal of St. Francis and St. James School, I was asked to work in their hot lunch program. I decided it was of greater importance to work at the school because the woman in charge had left the program. I enjoyed getting back with school children again."

Two memorable times for Sister Marie Therese were the SSND-EC in New York (1979) and her jubilee trip to Rome (1987). In addition to Rome, she traveled to Austria, France, Spain and Portugal.

At the age of 83, Sister Marie Therese returned to Good Counsel in 2004 to recuperate from surgery. She enjoyed having time to "relax, focus on other things and stretch my mind a little more." She did not like to consider herself "retired" and kept active by baking, visiting, playing cards, and reading – an especially favorite activity. She was also very interested in Bible Study. From an early age, she loved music and loved to sing. Known for her wonderful laugh and beautiful smile, she brought joy to many people. She was very family-oriented and looked forward to visits from family members, as well as going to family members' homes. Family members knew they could count on her in time of need, and they were often recipients of letters from her.

Sister Marie Therese concluded her autobiography in this way, "I am truly grateful to our Loving Lord for His unconditional love and for all the graces and gifts He has bestowed on me over the years." May Sister Marie Therese, who loved her "Loving Lord" in return for over ninety years, now experience eternally the everlasting love of Jesus, who calls her His own.

Sister Mary Kay Ash