



**“I am the way, the truth and the life.  
Whoever believes in me may have eternal life.”**

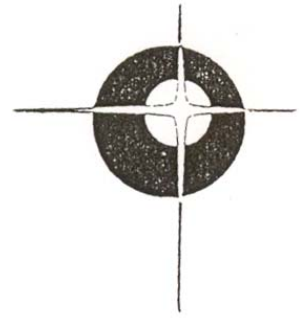
**--John 14:6a; 3:15**

**SISTER MARY CLAIRE SOLER, SSND**

February 5, 1917

July 22, 1938

January 23, 2009



At 5:45 p.m., on January 23, two weeks before her 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday, our beloved Sister Mary Claire Soler died peacefully at Good Counsel Provincial House. Sister Mary Martin Tobias and two of our nursing staff were with her at the time of her death. She had lived with cancer for several years, and has now completed her journey.

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Claire, with Father Ted Hottinger, SJ, as presider, will be on January 27 at 10:30 a.m. The vigil service is at 7:00 p.m. the preceding evening. Burial will follow in our cemetery. Loving sympathy to her sister Odilia Conlon, her brother Luke, brother-in-law Bill Jungwirth, nieces and nephews, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, as well as friends, colleagues and former students. She was preceded in death by her parents Julius and Clara (Capaul) Soler, brothers Lawrence and Leonard, and sisters Theresa Jungwirth, Genevieve Mullaly, Cecilia Soler, and Sisters M. Solana and Mary Alma, SSND.

Sister Mary Claire, Mary Agatha Soler, the sixth of ten children, was born February 5, 1917, on a farm on the outskirts of St. Paul, Minnesota. She wrote of her baptism, “The stormy weather of Minnesota delayed my baptism 20 days, and I was received into the Church of Sacred Heart.” Her parents were Swiss immigrants, who came to the United States shortly after their marriage.

In her first six years, Sister Mary Claire experienced more of the world than some people do in a lifetime. When she was two, the family returned to Switzerland, planning to stay, but it didn’t work out, and they came back to Minnesota after about a year. She remembered that “the return trip on the Atlantic fascinated me with its huge waves and leaping fish. Here were my first lessons on the wonders of God’s power and creation.” Her father then ran a dairy route from their farm near St. Paul for a short time. The family then moved to southern California for a year, where Mary was enrolled in a public school kindergarten, while the older children attended Catholic school.

The family then moved back to St. Paul, and Mary started 1<sup>st</sup> grade at St. John’s School, taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph. She recalled that her First Holy Communion on December 8, 1924, “sowed the seed to my religious vocation.” She credited her 8 years of education for “instilling strong religious convictions.”

As she was growing up, she learned many values from her family. Her mother, skilled in needlework and sewing, donated altar laces to the church. The family often hosted Swiss immigrants in their home until the immigrants could establish themselves. With their Swiss heritage, the family also had a keen interest in the outdoors, especially skiing. Classical music and reading were other family interests. Her father’s blindness caused the family to adapt in a number of ways, also. The older family members “assumed some of the burden of bringing income home.” Her mother used her seamstress skills to help support the family, and her father was able to do some of the household tasks.

A deep spirit of faith pervaded the home, which contributed to Mary's desire to be a sister. She remembered the rosary being prayed nightly in the native Romansch Swiss language.

After 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Mary attended Sacred Heart for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This was her first encounter with School Sisters of Notre Dame, and, "their edifying example and their friendliness impressed me." She was encouraged to enter the aspiranture for her sophomore year, which she did. Her sister Rosalie (Sister M. Alma), entered the candidature that same year. Following high school graduation in 1935, Mary also entered the candidature. Her second year in the candidature found her practice teaching at St. Mary, Madelia. She wrote of that experience, "With the help of the sisters and the informed experience of our supervisor, I learned the technique of teaching which I cherished." This technique was to carry her through a long successful primary teaching ministry.

On her reception into the Novitiate in 1937, she was given the name Sister Mary Claire. Her older sister Helen (Sister M. Solana) entered the candidature that same year. Sister Mary Claire was professed in 1938, and then missioned to St. Mary's, New England, ND, where she stayed as a primary grade teacher until 1950. She continued as a primary teacher in Minnesota at Dayton, Jordan, Sartell, Montevideo, Shakopee, St. Philip, Minneapolis, and St. Francis deSales, St. Paul. In 1979, she began teaching at St. Agnes in St. Paul, where she remained until her retirement in 2002. During her years of teaching, she earned degrees from St. Catherine's and St. Thomas.

A 1996 *Catholic Spirit* article featured the service given to the Church and SSND by the three Soler Sisters. At that time, Sister Mary Claire was still teaching full time at St. Agnes, and Sister Alma was a part-time reading specialist there. In that article, Sister Alma commented that she helped Sister Mary Claire correct papers at night because "Sister Mary Claire believes in an orderly classroom, so she moves about in her classroom all day while she teaches." A notice in the St. Agnes bulletin at the time of her retirement sums up Sister Mary Claire's dedication to teaching, "Sister Mary Claire loved teaching second and third graders and that is what she did during most of her teaching years. When she decided to work a few less hours a week (in 1999), she joined Sister Alma in the Reading Specialist Department where she continued mentoring those students with the 'extra' help they needed."

In her years of retirement on the Hill, she continued her teaching ministry as a tutor in the Good Counsel Learning Center, working there until this past summer. She wanted to stay involved in the lives of children as long as she was able, and so participated in the pen pal exchange with Loyola Catholic School 3<sup>rd</sup> graders for several years.

Quiet by nature, Sister Mary Claire was very vocal on a cause she deeply supported – the pro-life movement. Her address book contained the names of local, state and national politicians, to whom she frequently wrote letters. She also engaged in pro-life conversations whenever possible. Many of her photos prominently show the "Respect Life" pin that was a constant part of her attire. Her drawing of a rose frequently adorned prayer services and other writings. She often prayed for respect for life, and the words of a prayer by Father Stravinska echo her own convictions: "Father of all and bestower of life, let our convictions be so strong that all people come to learn and appreciate the value of human life which was exalted by your Son's participation in it."

May Sister Mary Claire now be enjoying eternal life with Jesus, her way, her truth and her life.

Sister Mary Kay Ash