



“Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.”

– Psalm 89:1

SISTER MARY ISABEL KATHREIN, SSND

April 14, 1921

July 17, 1941

March 16, 2010



Our beloved Sister Mary Isabel Kathrein, 88, died very suddenly about 6:45 p.m., March 16, 2010, in Mankato, Minnesota. Because of shortness of breath, she was being transported to Urgent Care and died in the car enroute. Sister M. Rosae Brown was driving the car and was with Sister Mary Isabel as she died.

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Isabel, with Father Ted Hottinger, S.J., as presider, will be on Monday, March 22, 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 21. Loving sympathy to her sisters Ann Schaeffer, Dickinson, ND; Betty (Pete) Krauter, Ada, MN; Rosemary (Jim) Ochsenfeld, Hot Springs, AR; Marge (Joe) Krauter, Fridley; and Barbara (Les) Parker, Arvada, CO.; her brothers Jack (Ann) Kathrein, Amidon, ND; and Nick (Rosella), Dickinson, ND, 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, John and Elizabeth (Hoffman) Kathrein, her sisters Eleanor Tarmann and Kathryn Kathrein, and brothers John and Tony (who died March 3, 2010).

Sister Mary Isabel's parents were both born near Budapest, Hungary. When they were young, their families came to America, her mother's family settling near Chicago, and her father's near Glendive, Montana. Some time later, both families bought farmland in North Dakota. Her parents were married in 1920, and on April 14, 1921, Helen (the future Sister Mary Isabel) was born, the oldest of 12 children. She was baptized a few weeks later at St. Mary's, New England. When Helen was two, the family moved to Detroit, Michigan, where her father worked in Henry Ford's automobile factory.

The family returned to North Dakota when Helen was five, and she hoped to start school at the country school near the farm. However the teacher thought she was too young and sent her home to wait a year. The next year she started school and completed five grades at the District school. In the summer of 1932, she made her First Communion after two months of instruction from the Sisters. She wrote, "The summer of 1932 was the first time that I can remember ever having seen a Sister. Ever since I had started school, I said I was going to be a country school teacher. I think it was after my First Holy Communion that I began to think of becoming a Sister as well as a teacher."

Helen spent her last two years of grade school as a boarder at St. Mary's in New England. When she arrived, she was placed in the seventh grade and thought that a mistake had been made since she had not yet completed sixth grade. However, Sister Catherine Becker informed her, "We are going to try you in the seventh grade," and with that response, Helen stayed in seventh grade.

Helen wanted to go to Good Counsel for high school and entered the aspiranture in 1934. In 1937 she entered the candidature, and the following spring graduated from high school. The 1938 school year found Helen teaching grades 1 and 2 in Madison, Minnesota. She attended college classes during her second year of candidature and became Novice Mary Isabel in 1940. Profession followed in 1941.

Sister Mary Isabel's first teaching assignment was at St. Stanislaus, St. Paul, where she taught 54 first and second graders. In October that year, she received word that her 13-

year-old sister, Kathryn, had died of a strep infection. Because of several family illnesses, Sister Mary Isabel made a home visit the following fall. Her mother's cousin, Sister Flora Krauter, accompanied her.

In 1944, Sister Mary Isabel began teaching grades one and two at St. Cyril & Methodius, Minneapolis. In following years through 1970, she served in a variety of elementary teaching roles in several schools including Holy Childhood, St. Paul; St. Joseph, Red Wing; St. John, Searles; St. John the Baptist, Savage; St. Joseph, Clements; St. Mary of the Lake, Minneapolis; St. Anne, Wabasso; and St. Leo, St. Leo, all in Minnesota; and St. Benedict, Strasburg; Ss. Peter & Paul, Mantador; St. Mary, New England; and St. Anne and St. Joseph, Bismarck, all in North Dakota.

In North Dakota during the 1930's and 40's, some Catholic schools were operated as public schools. Sisters still staffed the schools, with some restrictions on public prayer and teaching of religion. In 1948, the Committee for Separation of Church and State succeeded in passing an "anti-garb" initiative, which targeted the Sisters who taught in these public schools. The committee protested the wearing of the religious habit claiming it had a religious influence on students. Sister Mary Isabel was one of the sisters teaching in Strasburg at that time, and along with other sisters, exchanged her long habit for a simple US Women's Marine style uniform, and continued to teach in the school.

Sister Mary Isabel earned her BA from Mount Mary in Milwaukee in the 1940's, and in 1971 completed her study for Master's in Library Science from Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois. While there, she won a "trip around the world," a 6-week journey to Switzerland, Germany, Italy, France and Israel which she experienced in 1972.

From 1971-1997, Sister Mary Isabel served as a school librarian, for one year in both St. Francis and St. Matthew in St. Paul, and for the next 25 years at Trinity High School in Dickinson, North Dakota. The Dickinson Chamber of Commerce honored her at its 1995 Education and Business Recognition Banquet for outstanding contributions to the field of education and the Dickinson community. A newspaper article described Sister Mary Isabel in this way, "She encourages young people to learn through reading and believes that intelligent and skillful use of the library are essential for a good education." She was also recognized by the Trinity Student Council for her dedication to Trinity. Dickinson State University sent library science students to Trinity to be mentored by Sister Mary Isabel.

Following retirement from formal education in 1997, Sister Mary Isabel continued her librarian role at Good Counsel. She also worked at the switchboard and served as a driver for Provincial House Sisters. As her sight began to fail, she needed to give up some areas of service, but continued in the library up until last year with the aid of a magnifier. A lover of classical music, she often had music playing in the library and in her room. She enjoyed playing cards, and played a round of "Golf" (the card game) with Sister Norbert Marie Schares the Sunday before she died. As an avid reader, she was known to read a book as she watched television, and found reading very hard to give up when her sight diminished.

Sister Mary Isabel had a strong devotion to Mary, and led a decade of the rosary during community prayer the afternoon of her death. For many years, she also joined other sisters for a weekly hour with the Blessed Sacrament at St. John's Parish Perpetual Adoration. She often expressed appreciation for kindness shown to her.

Just a few weeks short of her 89th birthday when she died, may Sister Mary Isabel now be forever singing the goodness of God!

Sister Mary Kay Ash