



**“Come to me, all who labor, and I will give you rest.”**

**– Matthew 11:28-30**

**SISTER MARY MATTHEW MICHEL, SSND**

February 9, 1926

July 21, 1946

November 25, 2011



Our beloved Sister Mary Matthew Michel, 85, died peacefully at 7:35 a.m., Friday, November 25, 2011, in Isidore Hall, Good Counsel Campus, Mankato, Minnesota. Her good friend and community member Sister Mary Joyce Pietsch had just finished reading a reflection on the day's Scripture readings to Sister Mary Matthew before she died. In part, the reflection stated, "Could anything in this world be more marvelous than seeing the face of Jesus? . . . Spend a few moments contemplating the joy of being in God's presence and worshipping him for all eternity"\*

*\*The Word Among Us, November 2011*

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Matthew, with her nephew, Father James Heiar, SVD, as presider, will be Tuesday, November 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 November 28. Loving sympathy to her sisters Alverda Heiar, Helen Zeimet, Alvina Stillmunkes, Arlene Hager, Marian Kloft, Bernardine Hartung, and Carma (Lloyd) Frank; her brothers Donald and Bernard (Darlene); her brother-in-law Delbert Heiar; her niece, Sister Janet Heiar, SSND; her other 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, Mathew and Julia (Kilburg) Michel, a sister Dolores Heiar and a brother Herman.

Sister Mary Matthew, the fourth of twelve children, was born February 9, 1926, as a whirling snowstorm raged in Springbrook, Iowa, and the surrounding countryside. Five days later, she received the name Dula Mae at her baptism at SS. Peter & Paul Church, Springbrook. Sister Mary Matthew commented about her family's Catholic faith and connected it to her vocation. "My dad and mom had very strong faith. This was evident in many ways. . . . I recall the importance of prayers prayed as a family, especially table prayers. . . . I remember going to Sunday Mass as a little tot. After Mass, Dad and some of us would make a visit to the cemetery. Since the sidewalk leading to the cemetery went right by the convent, the sisters would stop and visit with us. Those visits with the sisters impressed me. From an early age I wanted to be a sister." Her dad also served as a dependable driver for the sisters and was often called upon when the sisters needed transportation.

At the age of six, Dula Mae entered first grade at SS. Peter & Paul School. She was especially excited because both of her parents had also attended this school. Throughout her grade school days, Dula Mae loved her teachers and never missed a day of school. She wrote, "Upon graduation from eighth grade, I told the sisters that I wanted to be a sister. . . . Sister Miriam (Thissen) told me about the aspiranture at Good Counsel in Mankato, where young girls who would like to become sisters could reside and attend high school." Her parents consented, and in September 1939, "Dad, accompanied by Sisters Miriam and Adele (Olheiser), drove me to Mankato which was over 300 miles from home." Contending with homesickness, she decided at Christmas vacation that she did not want to return to Good Counsel. But after visiting with the sisters in Springbrook and enjoying time with her family, she took the bus back to Mankato. She was extremely grateful to Sister Agnesine Obinger, her aspirant directress, and the chaplain, Father Alton Scheid, for their guidance during her high school years.

Dula Mae's decision to enter the candidature in 1943 was recounted by Father James Heiar in a homily given at her Golden Jubilee Celebration, "If there was ever any doubt, it was soon resolved by a normal development. My mom had been working for Aunt Rose and Uncle Pete, doing the canning, laundry and other household tasks. But Mom got rheumatic fever and so Grandma sent you, Dula Mae, as the replacement. In your own words, 'I found this difficult, as I really didn't know much about baking bread and canning. . . .' You were very glad to get back to Mankato for the candidature and college classes on August 29, 1943."

Following one year of study and preparation in the candidature, Dula Mae and two classmates were sent to St. Stanislaus, Winona, where she taught first grade. At her reception into the novitiate in 1945, she was given her dad's name, Sister Mary Matthew, which was a real joy for her. She professed first vows in 1946 and awaited news of her first teaching assignment. She and a classmate were missioned to St. Albert, Albertville, Minnesota, and traveled there by train, a new experience for both of them. She taught first and second grades and also assisted with sacristy work through the 1947-48 school year. In 1948, in order to be able to take college classes at Diocesan Teachers' College and St. Catherine's, she was sent to teach first grade at St. Matthew School in St. Paul. There she taught classes of 50+ students in addition to attending classes on Saturdays. She also assisted candidates who came to St. Matthew's for teaching experience and served again as assistant sacristan and helped count the Sunday collection.

In 1953, Sister Mary Matthew was transferred to Immaculate Conception, Gilbertville, Iowa, where she taught first grade for eleven years. One of her great joys there was preparing children to receive their First Holy Communion, which was always on Mother's Day. In December 1963, while gathering her schoolwork to take home, she displaced a disc in her back and was hospitalized in traction for about a month. Because of the back injury and foot problems, she was advised not to continue in Gilbertville, so in May 1964, she moved to Good Counsel. She underwent two foot surgeries and skin grafting that summer, and was assigned to teach second grade at Holy Rosary, North Mankato. Because of continuing health problems, her orthopedic surgeon suggested that she leave the teaching profession, which she did in January 1968.

At the same time, the province accountant became disabled, and Sister Mary Matthew was asked if she would help with the province bookkeeping. She consented and worked in this role until 1987. In a Good Counsel Academy publication, she commented, "I am doing the bookkeeping in an office which formerly was my sophomore homeroom. . . . I love this work as much as I loved teaching." As bookkeeper, she assisted Sister Mary Joyce Pietsch, province secretary, with the province finances. Sister Mary Matthew wrote, "When I started working in the finance area I caught the baseball fever from Sister Mary Joyce, a real Twins fan."

In 1987, Sister Mary Matthew became the Province Medical Claims Secretary, a position that she held until 1999. At Sister Mary Matthew's retirement gathering, Sister Katherine DuVal, Provincial Leader, summarized her ministry: "Your sisters who have dealt personally with you can attest to your detective know-how, persevering service and organizational skills as you deciphered and tracked every lost, confusing or incorrect bill. . . . And, over the years, you have had to adjust to five different leadership groups – no small accomplishment! . . . You have been an invaluable resource to the council, the finance office and the province."

A high point of Sister Mary Matthew's life was joining her family in 1995 to celebrate the International Kilburg Fest in Luxembourg. Over 85 members of the Kilburg clan were guests at a famous castle which once belonged to the family in Vianden. The group visited vineyards that have been in the family for over 500 years and also toured areas of Germany with Kilburg connections.

Sister Mary Matthew did not really retire. She continued to give community service in a variety of ways until just a few months before her death. Whether she was shredding documents, clipping labels, assembling folder contents, or a variety of other tasks, she willingly gave of her time (and, in season, shared her opinions of the Minnesota Twins' success and failure).

Family and SSND community were very important to Sister Mary Matthew. Father James recognized this as he stated, "We, your relatives and friends, affirm you in your life project as a School Sister of Notre Dame. We pledge to you our continued love and affection. You have given us joy through your lifestyle."

May Sister Mary Matthew now enjoy the heavenly rest promised by Jesus to those who labor for His cause, the heavenly rest of those spending their eternity in God's presence.

Sister Mary Kay Ash