



**Birth**  
January 28, 1925

**Baptism**  
January 30, 1925

**Profession**  
August 11, 1946

**Death**  
December 19, 2014

**Burial**  
Notre Dame of  
Elm Grove Cemetery  
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

*Precious and blessed is  
the death of the faithful  
before God... for  
they die in union with  
their dear Jesus, in the  
grace of God, in peace.*

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger  
Foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame  
Letter 11, September 10, 1831

## *In Loving Memory*

### Sister Mary [Mary Howard] De Cleene, SSND

**B**orn in De Pere, Wis. on January 28, 1925, to William and Christine (Scray) De Cleene, she was the fifth oldest of 14 children. The children attended St. Mary School, which was staffed by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Howard, the oldest was in first grade at St. Mary's, De Pere. In excitement, he told his teacher, Sister Bernice, that our family had a new baby girl. Sister suggested to him to tell his parents to name her Mary Margaret because that is such a beautiful saint's name. The next day when the bus came to pick up Howard for school, he refused to go. After many questions he finally told mother, "I won't go back to school until you name the baby what sister said you should name the baby." So that is how she got her name.

Mary had a strong desire to enter religious life but following eighth grade graduation, her mother asked her to stay at home and be her helper. Mary was 17-years-old when her brother, Howard was killed, while in military service, on his way to World War II action, in New Guinea. This sad event prompted Mary to ask, "What is this life if not a preparation for death?" She found the necessary courage to follow her vocation and entered the SSND candidature on February 14, 1943. At her reception as a novice, in 1945, she was given the religious name Mary Howard. In later years, she returned to using her baptismal name. Her first vows were professed on August 11, 1946. Sister Mary earned a bachelor's degree with a major in education and minors in English and speech from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1960.

Some of Mary's wonderful traits included earnestness, dedication, perseverance and creativity. She loved and enjoyed teaching. She said, "Ideas came faster than I could manage to carry them out." Once when a supervisor was in her classroom, Mary left to get some supplies. When she returned she found a display of cards and candies on her desk. The entire class stood and sang, "Happy Birthday" to her. As she turned all colors of the rainbow she thanked the children and continued class. After school the supervisor questioned her as to why the children had done that. She replied it was probably because on their birthdays she always gave them a surprise. That class celebrated her birthday three more times that year, but she says, "Thank God no supervisor was present."

In 1961 she had the privilege of being with her mother in her home after her mom was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. She admired her mother's spirit of resignation and cheerfulness. She said her mother prayed aloud, frequently talking to God as only one could do to one who had become a lifelong friend and companion.

Sister Mary served as an elementary educator for 35 years. Her teaching missions in Wisconsin were: SS. Peter and Paul, Wisconsin Rapids; Holy Assumption, West Allis; Sacred Heart, Appleton; Holy Trinity, Milwaukee; and St. Gabriel, Prairie du Chien. Her last teaching mission was at St. Sebastian School, Bessemer, Mich.

*continued*

# In Loving Memory



*Sister Mary De Cleene*



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**School Sisters  
of Notre Dame**  
Central Pacific Province

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD  
THROUGH EDUCATION

When she was missioned to St. Gabriel, Prairie du Chien, Sister Mary taught school in the mornings and spent afternoons and evenings doing parish home visits as a member of the Social Action Committee. In three years she visited 550 homes which immeasurably deepened her faith and led her to parish ministry which included being director of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) process. This too was an awesome experience. In Manitowoc, becoming religious education coordinator was another natural step. It was here she learned about small church communities also known as Christian Life Communities (CLCs), which were enthusiastically received.

With her retirement in 1995, she did volunteer ministry in Wisconsin at St. Mary, Omro and St. Peter, Beaver Dam. In 2003 Sister Mary moved to the Notre Dame of Elm Grove community where she continued to serve through her prayers and presence.

Sister Mary is survived by her siblings Bernice Strenn, Loretta Verhasselt, Al (Joann), Helen Verhasselt, Sister Vonnie De Cleene, SSND, Alice Morrell, Joyce De Cleene and Judy (Bob) Johanski, her sisters-in-law Leona De Cleene and La Verne De Cleene and many loving nieces and nephews, dear friends and the SSND Community. She was preceded in death by her parents William and Christine De Cleene and her siblings Rita Boucher, Howard, Leo, Harold and Vic De Cleene.

The gift of Sister Mary's generous heart continued to the end. – O holy joy!  
Rest and dance, Mary, in the love of your God and spouse, family and friends.  
Pray for us.

*This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information  
and the eulogy presented by Sister Joan Emily Kaul, SSND.*