



School Sisters of Notre Dame  
Central Pacific Province

Transforming the world through education

**2017 Jubilee**

**Celebrating 60 years**  
*First Profession—7/17/1957*

## **Sister Bernita Marie Bittner, SSND**

*Sister Bernita Marie graduated from Mount Mary College in 1958 and began teaching middle school students at St. Anthony in Milwaukee. In 1964, she was called to the diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she taught and served as a counselor at West Catholic High School. From 1976 through 1982 she served as director of religious education at Sacred Heart Parish in Bad Axe, followed by a period of study and renewal. She became director of initial formation for the former Milwaukee Province in 1984, serving there for eight years. In 1987 she and a friend established the Wisconsin Rural Women's Initiative, a program to provide a safe place for farm and rural women to share their stories and to build their self-esteem and self-confidence. The program is now in its 20th year. Throughout the 1990s and well into the new millennium, Sister Bernita Marie served as a private spiritual and retreat director, and also helped promote wellness and healing through body-energy work. She continues to volunteer in these roles, as well as a prayer and presence witness in Milwaukee. She holds a bachelor's in Latin with a minor in English from Mount Mary College, and graduated in 1973 with a master's of guidance and counseling from Michigan's Wayne State University.*



### *A memory I have to share...*

The weekend of February 11-12, 2017, was a special one for me. It was the celebration of 20 years of Wisconsin Rural Women's Initiative (WRWI), a program initiated by myself and co-director, Mary Bub back in 1997. It all started with a phone call in which Mary asked me if I would like to do something with her for farm and rural women. I had spent six years of ministry as a director of religious education in Bad Axe, Michigan, and loved working in a rural area. I then spent two years in Bird Island, Minnesota, before coming back to Milwaukee. Needless to say, my response was a faith-filled yes. Over the next many years, Mary and I walked in faith, empowered and led by the Spirit, to establish a program to help hundreds of farm and rural women become empowered, self-confident and assertive through the use of the WRWI Circle Process. We traveled over many miles of Wisconsin roads, reaching out to women, making friends and watching women blossom into taking leadership roles in the program. I retired in 2007, the year of my 50th Jubilee, and Mary retired this year. It was a delight to be a participant in the Circle Process of the weekend being so capably led by women we had introduced to the process. The program is continuing in good hands. God is so good!

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