



Birth
Jan. 31, 1926

Baptism
March 7, 1926

Profession
Aug. 9, 1945

Death
Aug. 17, 2016

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 Willene Grossaint, SSND

Born Jan. 31, 1916 in Greeley, Colorado, to William and Effie (Caves) Grossaint, she was baptized Agnes Marie at St. Peter Church, Greeley. Agnes was the fifth and last child in the family. She relayed her pleasant memories of growing up on a large farm and ranch where Agnes, her brother and three sisters helped to herd cattle and enjoyed corn husking, harvest time, barn dances and more.

In 1932, before Agnes could join her older siblings at the little schoolhouse in Galeton, Colorado, the family moved to Marshfield, Wisconsin. She attended first grade at St. John's School and met the School Sisters of Notre Dame for the first time. The family moved the following year and she went to a little country school at Stratford and Neillsville, Wisconsin. St. Mary's School in Neillsville was completed in 1939 and she had the happy privilege of being taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame again. She admired her eighth grade teacher, Sister M. Joalice, and noted, "Perhaps this was God's way of directing my future." She told Sister Joalice about her desire to be a sister. Agnes' parents were informed and they gave permission for Agnes to attend the SSND aspiranture high school at Academy of Our Lady in Chicago. She studied there for two years and then entered the SSND candidature at Notre Dame Convent in Milwaukee, where she completed her high school studies.

Received as a novice in 1938, Agnes was given the religious name, Mary Willene. She professed first vows Aug. 9, 1945. Sister Willene received a bachelor's degree in education at Mount Mary College, Milwaukee in 1953 and earned a master's degree in education, guidance and counseling at Marquette University, Milwaukee in 1972.

Sister Willene taught for 33 years at the following elementary schools: St. Margaret, Chicago; and in Wisconsin at St. Mary, Port Washington; St. George, Kenosha; Sacred Heart, Appleton; St. Mary, Menasha; Our Lady of Peace, Marshfield; SS. Peter and Paul, Wisconsin Rapids and Sacred Heart of Jesus, Nekoosa.

In 1978, she moved into other work, first serving as secretary for the Justice and Peace Center in Milwaukee. Sister Willene was called to SSND community service to work as purchaser for the Notre Dame Health Care Center in Elm Grove, Wisconsin. She worked for several years at Security Micro Imaging in Milwaukee when a volunteer ministry opportunity arose through an old friend, Sister Mary Frances Reis, BVM. The bishop for the Diocese of Springfield, Missouri, had asked the sisters to start a mission located in the southern-most part of the state, known as the boot heel. People living there faced many problems: poverty, drugs, illiteracy and violence. The sisters helped to address a variety of needs: collaborating with healthcare efforts; helping with classes and GED services; assisting migrant workers; volunteering at the food pantry; and offering movement classes at the local fitness center. Sister Willene wrote about her experience there, "During my five years in this ministry, Sister Frances and I lived real

continued

In Loving Memory



*Sister Mary Willene
Grossaint*



community life which supported our everyday outreach to the people. I am forever grateful for all that this time has meant to me. It has changed and enriched me and taught me so many lessons.”

Due to a back injury in 2002, Sister Willene returned to Elm Grove for therapy. After she had recovered, she responded to the community’s need for a hospitality coordinator at Notre Dame of Elm Grove. Serving for eight years in this role, she noted, “I found that service very enriching and I made many new friendships.” Since 2010, Sister Willene ministered by her prayer and presence.

Sister Mary Willene Grossaint died Aug. 17, 2016 at Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Elm Grove, Wisconsin. She was 90 and is survived by her dear sisters Ruth Griebie and Ethel Mader, loving extended family of nieces and nephew, dear friends and the SSND Community. She was preceded in death by her parents, her brother, Ernest and sister, Helen Clennon.

In closing, I share a section from Proverbs 31 that summarizes who Sister Willene was for so many of us, who were gifted with her love and friendship.

She was a VALIANT woman; her roots were firmly planted.
The kingdom was within; her heart, treasure-filled.

She was a JOYFUL woman for whom laughter was no stranger:
a song to sing, a smile to give, a hand to clasp or embrace.

She was a STRONG woman whose heart and arms withstood
the pressures and the worries that each day unfolded.

She was a PATIENT woman waiting through storm and night
for new life, new growth, rich harvest.

She was a LOVING woman ever giving and forgiving,
ever caring and concerned.

She was a SHARING woman who with arms outstretched
gave her gifts and treasures to those both near and far.

This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information and the eulogy written by Sister Phyllis Marie Grzeczka, SSND

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**School Sisters
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