



In Loving Memory

Sister Darlene Lenzmeier

After days of patient waiting, our beloved Sister Darlene Lenzmeier, 82, died peacefully at 1:22 p.m. on Friday, February 14, 2025, at Benedictine Living Community - St. Gertrude's and the Gardens, Shakopee, Minnesota. Sisters had been visiting and praying with her in the days before her death and were present, along with a Hospice nurse, when she died on the feast of St. Valentine.

Sister Darlene, an only child, was born November 16, 1942, at St. Francis Hospital in Shakopee, Minnesota. Jerome and Mathilda (Sand) Lenzmeier presented their daughter, named Darlene Loretta, for baptism at St. Mark's Church in Shakopee one week later.

In September 1948, Darlene enrolled in first grade at St. Mark's Grade School. She wrote, "Oddly enough, my being an only child did not hinder my love for little children. After school we played softball or football or else I would tell them stories. In the 7th and 8th grade I began to supervise the second grade. Those experiences ranged from opening thermos bottles to teaching them games." Following eighth grade graduation in 1956, she became a boarder at Good Counsel Academy in Mankato, Minnesota. While at the academy, she excelled in academics and athletics and was elected president of the Girls' Athletic Association during her senior year. She continued her story, "A religious vocation was then the farthest thing from my mind. When the idea would come, I would quickly put it out of my mind, but at the end of my senior year I could no longer resist Our Lord's loving invitation. Despite opposition from my mother, I entered the candidature on September 5, 1960."

During her year as a candidate, Darlene took college courses leading to a teaching degree and learned about the life of a School Sister of Notre Dame (SSND). She was received into the novitiate on July 16, 1961, and given the name Stephen Mary. Profession of first vows followed on July 17, 1962, and she and her classmates continued their college courses for the next two years. In the fall semester of 1963, she completed her student teaching in a fourth grade classroom at SS. Peter & Paul School, Mankato.

Sister Stephen Mary graduated from the Mankato Campus of Mount Mary College (now University) in July 1964, and then began her teaching ministry at St. Stanislaus School, St. Paul, Minnesota, where she again taught fourth-graders. Her mother died very suddenly in late May 1965, shortly before the end of the school year. With the help of her aunt, Sister Leander Lenzmeier, she was able to work through the many details of funeral preparation and bring some consolation and support to her dad before returning to St. Stanislaus for the final day of school.

On December 11, 1966, as Sister Stephen Mary and Sister Leo Doreen Monzel were returning to St. Stanislaus Convent, they were involved in a car-train collision. The sisters were thrown from the car, and Sister Stephen Mary suffered a severe head injury, in addition to a fractured arm and other injuries. She was in a coma

Birth
November 16, 1942

Baptism
November 22, 1942

Profession
July 17, 1962

Death
February 14, 2025

Burial
Good Counsel Cemetery,
Mankato, Minnesota

*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

continued

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for several weeks. A newspaper article from early January 1967 recounted the loving, prayerful response from family, sisters, friends and people who had never met her. As she gradually became conscious, it was apparent that the injury had caused permanent damage, although the extent was not immediately known. In her journey toward recovery, she spent two months at the Kenny Institute in Minneapolis. When she was able, Sister Stephen Mary moved into Health Care at Good Counsel.

Sister Stephen Mary professed her final vows in 1968, one year later than the rest of her class. At that time, she wrote in a letter to Sister Margareta Bertrand, the provincial leader, "I want to deeply thank you very much and may God reward you for allowing me to take those lovely final vows. I am so happy, only God knows that." In that letter she also wrote of her prayer for Sister Margareta and then asked for a "Notre Dame job." She so wanted to be of service to the community.

Sister Stephen Mary returned to her baptismal name, Darlene, in 1986. Beginning in 1987, she was able to take advantage of the services offered by Mankato Rehabilitation Center, Inc. (MRCI). She went daily to the MRCI site where she assisted with various workshop projects and participated in many of the activities that were offered there. She especially enjoyed Friends' Club and Chefs' Club. In 2017 she was recognized for 30 years of service at MRCI.

Living on Good Counsel Hill, Sister Darlene enjoyed engaging with sisters and staff. Very appreciative of the care given to her, she continually responded, "Thank you. Thank you very much!" Another common response was, "I pray for you all day, every day!" It was very important for her to participate daily in community prayer with the sisters in the chapel. Afternoon coffee and cookies with others in the dining room was a highlight of her day. Her family, classmates and friends were a very special part of her life as they visited whenever possible and included her in their gatherings and celebrations. She spread joy in her unique way with her big smile and the comment, "You're my pal!"

Along with other SSND, Sister Darlene moved to Shakopee in fall 2022. She became a resident at St. Gertrude's skilled care facility.

The funeral Mass for Sister Darlene was held February 21, 2025, in the Windermere chapel, Shakopee, with Father John Kunz as presider. Visitation and sharing of memories preceded the liturgy. Burial of her cremains in the Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato will follow at a later date.

She is survived by her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND associates, including her SSND cousins, Sisters Monica Wagner, Esther Wagner, and Cheryl Marie Wagner, and other cousins. She was preceded in death by her parents, Jerome and Mathilda (Sand) Lenzmeier, and numerous aunts, uncles and cousins, several of whom had also been SSND.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash