

In Loving Memory

Sister Gladys (M. Susan) Schmitz



Birth
August 4, 1925

Baptism
August 9, 1925

Profession
July 19, 1953

Death
June 2, 2024

Burial
Our Lady of Good Counsel
Cemetery

*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

Sister Gladys (M. Susan) Schmitz, 98, died peacefully at Benedictine Living Community, Shakopee, Minnesota, on Sunday morning, June 2, 2024. Her earthly advocacy for those who are less fortunate is now completed.

A daughter, the oldest of four children in the Joseph and Clara Schmitz family, was born at St. Joseph Hospital in Mankato, Minnesota, on August 4, 1925, and named Gladys Marie at her baptism five days later. The Schmitz family lived just a few blocks from SS. Peter & Paul Church and School where Gladys entered kindergarten in 1930 and was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). Gladys' high school years were spent at Mankato Loyola and she later wrote, "Here I spent four years happily pursuing my studies, which I loved. Doubtless one of the most important things was the decision in May 1942 to attend daily Mass, which I adhered to religiously for years." In 1943, as a senior, she received a scholarship to the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota.

Gladys completed her college education under the direction of the Sisters of St. Francis and became a member of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis during her college years. She graduated from St. Teresa in 1947, with a double major in mathematics and chemistry. She then taught high school math and science in Sanborn, Minnesota, for two years before returning to St. Teresa to teach inorganic chemistry and supervise lab classes. While at St. Teresa, she decided to enter religious life and later wrote, "After investigating various possible congregations, my choice finally fell to the School Sisters of Notre Dame in spite of the fact that I had almost no contact with them for nine years, and that I had learned to love and esteem in a very special way the Franciscan Sisters."

At the age of 26, Gladys entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame candidature in Mankato in August 1951. She spent one year teaching math and science at Good Counsel Academy but, because of her age and previous experience, she was received into the novitiate in July 1952. She was given the name Sister M. Susan but later returned to her baptismal name. She professed first vows in July 1953 and continued her ministry in secondary education at St. Agnes, St. Paul, Minnesota (1953-1959), St. Peter, New Haven, Iowa (1959-61), St. Mary, New England, North Dakota (1961-63), Good Counsel Academy (1963-66), and Don Bosco, Gilbertville, Iowa (1966-69). She completed a master's degree in chemistry from Notre Dame University in 1963.

Sister Gladys and her sister Joan spent the summer of 1967 at SSND missions in Guatemala. She commented, "This was my first experience of extreme poverty, of learning about wealth and power tied to land ownership by a tiny elite, of learning about young men being kidnapped into the army, and of learning about death squads."

Exploring the possibility of becoming a nurse, Sister Gladys began working as a nursing assistant at Good Counsel in 1969. From 1970 until 1972, she continued this ministry in St. Paul while taking classes. In 1972, she enrolled in the nursing program in the local Austin, Minnesota, community college and earned her R.N. in 1974. She then returned to Guatemala to assess if this would be the best place to use her nursing skills, but soon felt that her call was not to Guatemala. Shortly after her return to Minnesota, she was invited by Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler to use her nursing skills in Chicago where there was a great need in the inner city. Sister Gladys accepted that invitation, saying, "where there was not only need, but where I'd have the best chance to concentrate on medical-surgical nursing, which was both my strong area and my interest." For six years, she lived with Sister Margaret Ellen along with sisters from other religious communities, "but always including one or more SSND from the Chicago Province. This was an extremely enriching experience – an opportunity to meet many people, new

continued

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Sister Gladys Schmitz



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ideas galore. . . Margaret had great ideas, attracted people with great ideas, and was a great enabler.” In addition to full-time work as a nurse, Sister Gladys became involved in organizations that promoted justice issues, including Bread for the World and Pax Christi. She began to lobby congresspeople, helped to educate through Churches and worked with the 8th Day Center for Justice. Her comment, “This sounds a little crazy, since I was working full-time as a nurse, but I learned what I could from each group and as there was some action planned by one group or the other, I ‘plugged in’ as I was able. More and more I began to see that all the issues were definitely related to each other.”

In 1982, Sister Gladys teamed with Sister Anne Mayer of the Chicago Province to develop Sisterhouse, a transitional home for women returning from jail or prison. Sister Gladys described it as “enabling the guests to live in community with us, while receiving help in rehabilitation and reshaping their lives.” She remained associated with Sisterhouse until 1988. In all, Sister Gladys worked at five different Chicago hospitals – Jackson Park, Illinois Central, St. Anne’s, Oak Park and St. Mary of Nazareth – gradually reducing her workload as she expanded her justice work.

Sister Gladys retired from nursing in 1993 and returned to Good Counsel. She wrote, “When I began to consider retirement from nursing, I shared with the Mankato provincial leaders my strong desire to spend whatever time and energy I had left to work on justice and peace issues. The council graciously acceded. When I returned to Mankato, Sister Dorothy Olinger, coordinator of the Provincial Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, invited me to work with her, an invitation I was happy to accept.” She began to focus on environmental issues, learning about the universe story, making connections and meeting with Mankato area activists. However, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq diverted her back to peace issues. Beginning in November 2001, Sister Gladys and a small group of like-minded individuals became a “voice to protest war and militarism and to stand for peace” on a local street corner. She thought this once-a-week protest would be short-lived, but it continues to the present, with her colleagues still standing for peace.

In addition to the weekly protests, Sister Gladys composed letters to government officials and newspapers, wrote articles and organized events around peace, justice and environmental issues. She discovered that technology, especially email, was an effective way of communicating her message. She read copiously and shared information with anyone who showed interest. She was a strong advocate for Recycling, Reducing and Reusing. A St. Paul Pioneer Press profile stated, “Sister Schmitz is one of those people who does something about the world’s messes.” She based her involvement in these issues on her Christian beliefs: “I encourage all of us to pray and reflect on these sensitive, core topics and to pray for conversion of heart – our own and others, to what Jesus demands of us.” Both at Good Counsel and in Shakopee, she would often be found in the chapel, praying for God’s blessing on the world.

Throughout her life, Sister Gladys followed Jesus, the Good Shepherd. May she now enjoy the fullness of God’s presence – and continue to advocate for the “world’s messes” from a heavenly perspective!

A Memorial Mass for Sister Gladys was held June 10 in the Windermere chapel, Shakopee, with Father John Kunz as presider. Sharing of memories preceded the liturgy. Sister Gladys requested a green burial, which was held on June 4 with many family members, friends and sisters in attendance.

Sister Gladys is survived by her brother Jim and his wife Rose, nieces and nephews and their families, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND Associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, Joseph and Clara (Dorn) Schmitz, and her sisters, Clarice and Joan Schmitz.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash