

# *In Loving Memory*

## Sister Janet (Kenneth Ann) Mallak



**Birth**  
April 11, 1947

**Baptism**  
May 4, 1947

**Profession**  
July 17, 1967

**Death**  
December 1, 2024

**Burial**  
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

On the First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2024, our beloved Sister Janet (Kenneth Ann) Mallak, 77, died at Benedictine Living Community in Shakopee, Minnesota. Two of her School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) classmates were with her when she died. Her brother and sister had been with her earlier.

In her autobiography, Sister Janet described her first days, "On April 11, 1947, snow fell hard and fast. Ice covered the roads. Yet, Mom and Dad made it to the Hutchinson [Minnesota] hospital safely, and my brother and I were born. The first weeks of our life were spent in the hospital before we were strong enough to make it on our own. But the day did come, and we were brought home to a farm located outside of Silver Lake." The twins, Janet and Kenneth, were baptized May 4, 1947, at St. Adalbert's Church in Silver Lake, Minnesota. Two more daughters, Mary Jo and Loretta, completed the Mallak family. She described the influence of her family, "I believe a lot of processing of life and prayer happened as we worked in the fields and the garden. I became rooted in the perseverance and grace that are needed to live well in the seasons of life."

At the age of 6, Janet and Ken entered first grade at St. Adalbert School, where they were taught by SSND. Janet wrote, "Going through the usual struggles and joys of grade school, I began to make plans for the future. The School Sisters of Notre Dame, especially Sister Anita Hoffman, made a great impression on me. One evening, I told Mom that I wanted to go to Good Counsel in Mankato, Minnesota for high school. Maybe I would like to be a sister." Janet joined the SSND aspiranture at Good Counsel in the fall of 1961 as a freshman. Her desire to become a sister grew during her four years at Good Counsel, and she entered the SSND postulate following her graduation in 1965. She was received into the novitiate on July 16, 1966, and given the name Sister Kenneth Ann. She later returned to her baptismal name.

Following her profession of first vows in July 1967, she remained at Good Counsel for one year and continued her college education. In 1968, she began a 19-year ministry as a teacher of primary grade children. She taught at St. John the Baptist, Savage; SS. Peter and Paul, Blue Earth; Shakopee Area Catholic School; Immaculate Conception-St. Joseph, Raymond, Iowa; St. Francis Xavier, Sartell; and St. Mary, Worthington. While in Shakopee, her work with the sacramental program led to her also working with parents, "which brought an awareness of their search for God in their lives." As a teacher, she learned that, "First I must know and care for the person and then find a way that will help them grow in their potential. And as we all know, children are the first to say, 'I don't get it.' Then I would have to study/reflect deeper and try again. It never occurred to me that this pattern of life would carry me to the ministry of spirituality."

*continued*

# In Loving Memory



*Sister Janet (Kenneth Ann)  
Mallak*



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In 1987, Sister Janet joined the staff of the Center for Spiritual Development in Bird Island, Minnesota. For her first two years, she shared life and ministry with her cousin, Sister Margaret Picha, one of the Center's founders. Over a 14-year span, her role at the Center evolved across several positions, including staff member, co-director and director. She was a spiritual director, presented seminars and helped supervise the Spiritual Director Preparation Program. In 1989, she earned a master's degree in ministry from Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, in addition to her earlier degree, a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Mount Mary College (now University), Milwaukee, in 1974. She also enjoyed the "etc." of life at Bird Island – gardening, food preparation, being a member of the parish choir and living in rural Minnesota.

The Franciscan Spirituality Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin, welcomed Sister Janet as a staff member in 2002. She was invited to consider a position that would include spiritual direction, presentations/seminars and co-directing their Spiritual Direction Preparation Program. She spent a very fulfilling seven years in La Crosse. In 2009, the director of the Center wrote, "Janet believes that there is a wonderful gift in the most unassuming, ordinary person. That everyone, no matter how wounded, broken or self-deprecating, has a gift for the world. Most people believe this. What is unique about Janet is that she has the ability to enable people to believe it about themselves. Somehow those who sit in the same room with Janet begin to own their own giftedness. I don't know exactly how this happens. Some name it as her deep empathy or her unconditional love and acceptance, some use only one word: presence."

Sister Janet was elected to the final provincial council of the Mankato Province in 2009, when the province was deeply involved in the process of combining with three other SSND provinces to form the Central Pacific Province. During her two-year term, she worked with council members of the four provinces to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. After the formation of the new province in 2011, she enjoyed a very short sabbatical and then returned to a ministry of spiritual direction, using Good Counsel Hill as her base. Unfortunately, the onset of dementia curtailed her ability to continue sharing her life and gifts with others.

Throughout her life, Sister Janet, in her words, had, "many passions that brightened my life in addition to my ministry – family and friends, gardening, making bread, cross-stitching and crafts. And all of this is highlighted if there is a good cup of coffee and a piece of dark chocolate!"

The Funeral Mass for Sister Janet was held Monday, December 9, in the Windermere chapel with Father John Kunz as presider. Visitation and Sharing of Memories preceded the Liturgy. Burial in the Good Counsel cemetery in Mankato followed.

She is survived by her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND associates, her sisters Mary Jo (Tom) Amon and Loretta (Pat Nienow) Mallak and her brother Ken, nieces and a nephew. She was preceded in death by her parents, Edward and Mary (Picha) Mallak.

*By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND*