

In Loving Memory

Sister Judith (Mary Lourdes) Best



Birth
February 19, 1940

Baptism
March 19, 1940

Profession
July 29, 1960

Death
January 9, 2025

Burial
Notre Dame of Elm Grove
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 Judith Best, 84, died peacefully, January 9, 2025, at Trinity Woods, Milwaukee. The third daughter of Edna (Doran) and William Best, she was born on February 19, 1940, in Peoria, Illinois. She was baptized at St. Bernard Church in Peoria on March 19, 1940, and named Judith Ann. Her father was a builder, and her mother assisted in creating Best Homes, an assembly plant for building quality prefabricated homes after World War II.

Judith attended St. Bernard School, which was staffed by the Dominican Sisters. The assembly plant moved from Peoria to Effingham, Illinois and Judith attended St. Anthony's High School where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND).

Judith had a life-long and deep devotion to Mary. During a European vacation with her parents, which included a visit to Lourdes, she credits Mary with gifting her with the courage to enter SSND. She entered the candidature at Sancta Maria in Ripa, St. Louis, on August 28, 1958. She was received into the novitiate on July 28, 1959 and given the name Mary Lourdes. She professed first vows on July 29, 1960, and final vows on July 29, 1966. Later, she returned to her baptismal name and was most often known as Sister Judy.

Sister Judy received a bachelor's degree in history from the former Notre Dame College, St. Louis, in 1962. She earned a master's degree in theology from the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, in 1971.

She began her teaching career in St. Louis, first at Rosary High School (1962-1967), followed by Rosati-Kain High School (1967-1970). From 1970-1972, she was a member of the SSND interprovincial committee for spiritual development. During this time, she visited Berlin and secretly carried SSND congregational documents to sisters behind the iron curtain. She also encouraged other sisters to join her in a Better World Retreat in Rome. Energized by these experiences, she sought to implement the action commitment of the 1972 General Chapter by the establishment of the Center of Spiritual Development. In 1973, she was one of the founding members of the Center of Spiritual Development located at Notre Dame Hall on the campus of St. Louis University, St. Louis. With other members of a "Retreat Team," they offered spiritual direction, days of recollection, retreats and an internship program for future spiritual/retreat directors.

In August 1973, she participated in a march alongside striking United Farm Workers who were picketing for a just contract near Fresno, California. She was arrested and spent two weeks at the Fresno County Industrial Farm. Dorothy Day and a number of other participants were also imprisoned with her.

Returning to St. Louis, she spent the next years in retreat/spiritual direction working out of Notre Dame Hall. In 1981, she was appointed the director of spiritual renewal for the laity for the diocese of Jefferson City, Missouri. In 1987,

continued

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Lourdes) Best*



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she was elected to the Provincial Council of the former St. Louis Province. Following her term of four years, she taught at Notre Dame High School (1991-1998), St. Louis. She had a sabbatical at Windridge Solitude in Lonedell, Missouri, and once again ministered as a spiritual director.

In 2002, she moved to Washington, Missouri, and then three years later to Clover Bottom, Missouri, as a spiritual director and researcher of SSND heritage. During this time, she coordinated the development of *Sturdy Roots*, an educational resource containing a series of DVDs and a website, www.sturdyroots.org, using primary resources to tell the heritage and spirit of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

In 2010, she moved to Sancta Maria in Ripa and continued as a charism resource. As her health failed, Sister Judy was transferred to Veronica House, The Sarah Community, Bridgeton, Missouri, in 2022 and to Trinity Woods, Milwaukee, in 2023. She passed away peacefully in the morning of January 9, 2025, at Trinity Woods. She chose a green (natural) burial and was buried in the SSND cemetery in Elm Grove, Wisconsin, on January 10, 2025.

A memorial Mass was held at Trinity Woods on January 21, 2025. In attendance were relatives, friends, SSND and SSND associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, Edna and William Best, her sisters, Colleen Best Hecht and Patricia Best Frederking. She is survived by nieces and nephews and their children, by her classmates, School Sisters of Notre Dame in community, SSND associates, friends and colleagues.

In recognition of Sister Judy's longtime residence and service in the St. Louis area, a celebration of life will be held at the Sancta Maria in Ripa Chapel, February 11, 2025, at 2 p.m.

Sister Judy was an excellent teacher and role model who inspired others by her intellectual curiosity, her love of contemplation and her courageous commitment to social justice. She was a joyful seeker of truth and a gifted person who used her talents for the betterment of others. As a contributor to Global Sisters Report, she wrote about the struggles and inequalities that exist in the political system in the United States. She also joined others in the "Nun on the Bus" tours throughout the country.

Sister Judy also had a great love for Mother Earth and initiated the formation of a group known as the "Earthy SSNDs" at Sancta Maria in Ripa. In their meetings, the sisters considered a variety of issues related to the care of Mother Earth. Sister Judy loved to sing and enjoyed a game of Scrabble. She embraced community life but also cherished times of solitude as she sought to follow Mary's directive "Do whatever He (Jesus) tells you."

May she be welcomed into eternal life by her God, Mary and her family members who have gone before her.

By Sister Carol Marie Wildt, SSND