



Birth
February 9, 1931

Baptism
February 9, 1931

Profession
July 13, 1954

Death
March 15, 2022

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

In Loving Memory

Sister Rita Schweitzer

Born during a blizzard on February 9, 1931, at St. Mary Hospital, Milwaukee, little Rita Jean began her adventurous life. She was the second child born to Elroy Orval Schweitzer and Marie Catherine Freuler. The family flourished in their little town where they lived next to the oil company they had purchased. The children attended school at North Lake State Grade School. In first grade, Rita was so inspired by her teacher, Miss Eleanor Mackenzie, that she decided that the life of a teacher would be for her someday. The following year, during her First Holy Communion Mass at St. Clare Church on June 22, 1941, it became very clear that she must leave her happy childhood home and surroundings and become a religious sister.

Sister Rita attend Messmer High School, where she met the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). Besides meeting the SSND at school, she joined a group to visit the former Milwaukee Street Motherhouse where she met Mother Fidelis Krieter. From high school, she went on to the former Milwaukee State Teachers' College to study music education. During college, her thoughts of devoting herself to God persisted. Close to her junior year, she decided to share her desire with her mother, who was not surprised. She entered the candidature the following September, in 1952. On July 13, 1954, she became a professed sister.

Sister Rita received a bachelor's degree in music education in 1955. After a semester at Mount Mary College (now University), she was called to fill in as a teacher at Pittsville, Wisconsin. Not only did she teach music, but they gave her English and typing classes to teach as well. The next school year, she was missioned to St. James, Madison, Wisconsin, where she was a full-time music teacher and played the organ for daily Mass.

The next nine years of her life were spent at St. Alphonsus School in Chicago, which had a population of 1,250 students in 20 classrooms. It was during this time that she wrote her thesis, titled, Music of the North American Indians: Songs for Use in the Elementary School. She received a master's degree in school music from the Chicago Music Conservatory in 1966.

After 23 years of teaching in elementary schools, Sister Rita began teaching at Mount Mary College (now University) in 1979. For 28 years, she engaged in a variety of educational offerings with such joy and enthusiasm. Besides her basic courses for music majors, she taught summer sessions as well.

After team-teaching with Sister Marcia Zofke for the first Elderhostel Program at the college, she coordinated a national one-week residential summer offering for more than a decade. She also initiated the first Wisconsin Orff Schulwerk Teacher Training Music Program in 1984, which enriched teachers who were interested in the creative process of using verse with music and movement. It ran for 18 summers with admirable enrollment numbers.

In addition to this, she continued to direct the Three Levels Certification Program and taught the recorder component for 16 summers. As if this is not busy enough, Sister Rita also visited three units at the Zablocki Veteran Affairs

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister Rita Schweitzer



Medical Center for 10 years. She says, “With an alto recorder on a shoestring around my neck and a small music stand, I played and sang veterans’ favorites: folk tunes, bar-room songs, hymns, and always, military anthems and patriotic songs.”

She loved her years of teaching adults because they brought a real appreciation of learning. As she moved on to her retirement phase, she just naturally saw it as a time to “do something for our own sisters.” She did this by providing a variety of musical experiences and activities for them and felt blessed in doing that. She loved every aspect of music and thanked God that she could sing and was able to share with others the beauty of music.

It was very important to her to close her story with the words of St. Alphonsus, who wrote: “Acquire the habit of speaking to God with familiarity and confidence – as to your dearest and most loving friend. Speak of your life, your plans, your troubles, your joys, your fears. In return, God will speak to you, not that you will hear audible words in your ears, but words that you will clearly understand in your heart.”

By Sister Elise Zettle, SSND

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of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

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