



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 20, 2017

Sister Mary Louis Pihaly, SSND

Mankato, Minn. – Sister Mary Louis Pihaly, 101, died Tuesday, March 14, 2017, in Notre Dame Health Care, Mankato, Minnesota. Active until a few months before her death, she nevertheless longed to be taken home. Sister Mary Louis was the last Mankato participant in the Nun Study.

The seventh of nine children and the second girl, she was born in St. Paul on February 25, 1916, and baptized Teresa Mary two days later at St. Francis de Sales Church. Her father was an auditor at the Great Northern Railway, which allowed him to use a pass to take his family on train trips. Her mother had a strong faith and went to Mass every morning, even though she made breakfast for all of her children and packed their lunches. Sister Melania Pilger, one of her mother’s sisters, was a School Sister of Notre Dame in Milwaukee and played an important role in Sister Mary Louis becoming an SSND.



All the Pihaly children attended St. Francis de Sales Grade School, with the boys continuing their education at Cretin High School and the girls at St. Joseph Academy. Each of the children learned to play the piano. When Teresa was in upper grades, her teachers told the students to pray often to become sisters or priests. She later wrote, “I did this and frequently desired to become a sister, but as I grew older, these desires became less frequent.” In late August 1932, prior to Teresa’s senior year, Sister Melania advised Teresa’s mother that if any of her daughters intended to become a sister, the earlier they would enter, the better. On September 1st, Teresa’s mother asked her if she wanted to become a sister. She answered, “Yes.” Arrangements were made for Teresa to enter the candidature in Mankato on Labor Day, September 5. Teresa completed her senior year at Good Counsel Academy as a candidate, graduating in 1933. Because she was so young, she stayed at Good Counsel the next year to take college classes, while the rest of her class was practice teaching. During the summer she took organ lessons for the first time, building on her piano background.

In the fall of 1934, she went to St. Michael School, Madison, Minnesota, where she taught first and second grades and gave piano lessons to two students. She was received into the novitiate on July 16, 1935, and given the name Sister Mary Louis, after her deceased father. She professed first vows on July 17, 1936, in her words, “the happiest day of my life. I have never before experienced so much spiritual joy and gladness.” After profession, she took a three-week course in liturgical music to obtain an organist’s certificate.

Sister Mary Louis continued her teaching ministry in 1936. In almost every instance, she was also responsible for either school or parish music in addition to teaching. She taught primary grades at St. Mary, Shakopee (1936-42); St. Mary, Bellchester (1942-48); SS. Peter & Paul, Mantador, North Dakota (1948-49); and St. Donatus, St. Donatus, Iowa (1949-54); intermediate grades at St. Albert, Albertville

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(1954-56) and St. John the Baptist, Searles (1956-60); and junior high at SS. Peter & Paul, New Hradec, North Dakota (1960-61); St. Francis Xavier, Sartell (1961-65); and St. Adalbert, Silver Lake (1965-67). Her next assignments were a mix of intermediate and junior high grades, with a few years in elementary administration: St. Ann, Kimball (1967-69); St. Paul, Comfrey (1969-70); St. Leo, St. Leo (1970-79); and St. Peter, Forest Lake (1979-1985). Because she taught in rural areas, there was no chance to complete her education on Saturdays as metropolitan-area teachers could do, so she could study only during summers. She earned a bachelor's degree from Mount Mary College in 1948.

In 1985, Sister Mary Louis realized that it was time for her to stop teaching. Sisters Margaret Roozen and Francette Malecha, directors of the Sandcastle Daycare Center in St. Paul, invited her to be their secretary. During this time, she lived at St. Francis de Sales Convent, her home parish. Sister Mary Louis continued as secretary until 1994. She then volunteered at Sandcastle, and wrote about this experience, "I worked with the babies. I sat in a rocking chair, and an aide put the baby in my lap. I would rock it, play with it, feed it the bottle or put it to sleep." In 2003 she moved to Good Counsel.

Sister Mary Louis remained active in her retirement years. An avid reader, she enjoyed her position as Learning Center Librarian. She spent her mornings in Ceramic Haven, painting ceramic figures. In the afternoons, she and other sisters crocheted mittens, scarves and other winter apparel that was distributed to St. Paul Public School students. She also contributed items for the gift shop and Craft Fair. Her "extra" time was spent praying, reading, playing cards and visiting sisters – and playing organ for community prayer in Notre Dame Health Care until she was 99 years old!

In 1986, Dr. David Snowdon proposed a research program on Alzheimer's disease, which would involve studying sisters' lives and, after death, their brains. Known as the Nun Study, this program gained much attention in the 1990s and early 2000s, especially after Dr. Snowdon published the results of his study in the book *Aging with Grace*. To participate in the study, sisters needed to be at least 75 years old, but when the study began in 1986, Sister Mary Louis was too young to qualify. Initially the study included only sisters from the Mankato Province, but it was expanded in 1991 to include sisters from other provinces, again with the minimum age requirement of 75. In 1991 Sister Mary Louis turned 75, and was therefore eligible to participate. She joined the study because she felt, "If I could help people, I'd be glad to do it."

In her life, Sister Mary Louis taught and helped many. In her death, she continues to educate through her sharing.

The Funeral Liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held March 17, in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial in the Good Counsel Cemetery. She is survived by nieces and nephews and their families and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents Louis and Mary (Pilger) Pihaly, her sisters Mary Pihaly and Agnes Kordell, and her brothers Leonard, John, Louis, Brother Joseph Alphonsus (Francis), FSC, Lawrence and Brother Louis Gerard (George), FSC. Memorial contributions may be made to the School Sisters of Notre Dame Retirement Fund, c/o Resource Development, 170 Good Counsel Drive, Mankato, MN, 56001-3138, or online at www.ssndcentralpacific.org/Partner/Donation.

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