



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Sister Mary Karen Anderson
Teacher, Musician**

Elm Grove, Wis. – Sister Mary Karen Anderson, 97, died May 28, 2017. Sister Mary Karen was born on April 1, 1920, to John and Marie Anderson in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She was given the baptismal name Catherine Isabel. Her father left the family, and her mother raised her and her only sibling, an older brother, Milton, alone.

She attended St. Boniface school in Milwaukee and then Messmer High School. She noted in her autobiography that she had decided around age 12 that religious vocation was not for her. Tragedy struck her small family on a 4th of July outing where her older brother Milton appeared to be drowning, a cousin tried to rescue him and both boys drowned.

Then, as a teenager, her mother died after a long battle with cancer. Sister Mary Karen went to live with her baptismal parents, her aunt and uncle. She wrote of this time in her autobiography, “My days were filled with loneliness and depression, but I found comfort in His words, ‘Even if father and mother forsake you I will not forsake you.’ Darkness and despair did gradually turn into light and joy. While pursuing a course in musical studies, I was chosen to be a professional concert singer. Life was filled with delight.” Mary Karen was a gifted musician who had decided on a career as a professional musician as a young adult. She was also engaged to be married. During the period of her engagement, she felt a strong call to a religious vocation. She wrote of this period in her life, “I was furious and in total shock! Weeks of pain-filled discernment followed, but love conquered. I ended my engagement and all my hopes and plans for a concert career. I surrendered my life to the call of the Master, in trust-filled obedience.” She professed first vows in 1947.



Sister Mary Karen was a graduate of Mount Mary College with a degree in Voice. She spent the majority of ministry as a music educator. She taught music at St. Mary High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, through 1953. She then spent two years of teaching high school at St. Michael in Chicago. Mary Karen then served in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, as a teacher, musician and administrator for middle school students at St. Vincent de Paul Grade School, for a total of 21 years. She continued to teach music full-time at Mount Mary University in Milwaukee for most of the next decade. Sister Mary Karen served the as a receptionist at the Visitation Home in Elm Grove from 1986 through 1990. Once retired she served in prayer and presence at Notre Dame of Elm Grove. She is survived by the SSND community and was preceded in death her parents and her brother, Milton Anderson. Memorial contributions may be made to the School Sisters of Notre Dame Retirement Fund, c/o Resource Development, 13105 Watertown Plank Road, Elm Grove, WI 53122 or online at www.ssndcentralpacific.org/Partner/Donation.

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