



**School Sisters  
of Notre Dame**  
Central Pacific Province

Central Office  
320 East Ripa Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63125-2897  
314-633-7005  
[www.ssndcentralpacific.org](http://www.ssndcentralpacific.org)

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:  
*Communications and Community Engagement*  
262-787-1032  
[communications@ssndcp.org](mailto:communications@ssndcp.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 30, 2017

**Sister Mary Elsa Bren, SSND**  
**Teacher, parish visitor and home health aide**

**Mankato, Minnesota** – Sister Mary Elsa Bren, 96, died Wednesday, October 18, 2017 at Mayo Clinic Health System Hospital, Mankato, Minnesota. In her SSND ministry she served as a home service sister, primary teacher, parish visitor and home health aide.

Sister Elsa was born on March 26, 1921, in New Hradec, North Dakota, to Frank and Mary (Stranik) Bren, two immigrants of Czech ancestry who came from Russia. One week later she was baptized Mary at SS. Peter & Paul Church, New Hradec. In 1926, at the age of five, Mary started school at SS. Peter & Paul, with School Sisters of Notre Dame as her teachers. It was at the time of her First Holy Communion that she experienced the desire to become a sister.



Following eighth grade graduation, Mary stayed at home to help with the housework on the farm and to care for her grandmother. She did not know how to tell her parents of her hope to become a sister and prayed for courage to tell them. Her parents, realizing that she was not yet sixteen, advised her to stay at home another year to pray and think over her plan. The year passed and she was still determined to become a sister. Her parents willingly gave their consent and she prepared for the candidature.

On August 27, 1936, Mary boarded the train for Mankato to enter the candidature. As a second-year candidate she worked in the kitchen at St. Agnes Convent, St. Paul. Since Mary was too young to be received into the novitiate she spent another year in the candidature. Mary became a novice on July 21, 1939, and was given the name Sister Mary Elsa.

Sister Mary Elsa professed first vows in 1940, and was sent to Guardian Angel Convent, Colton, Washington. She spent the next two years at St. Joseph Convent, Spokane. She then served as a home service sister at St. Leo Convent, St. Leo, Minnesota; St. Donatus Convent, St. Donatus, Iowa; St. Pius Convent, Scheffield, North Dakota; Good Counsel Convent, Mankato; St. Mary Convent, Shakopee; and SS. Peter & Paul, New Hradec.

During the late 1950s, the Mankato SSND Province experienced a shortage of teachers, and some home service sisters were asked to become teachers. Sister Mary Elsa was one of them. She first finished her high school education and then took college classes. In 1959 she began teaching primary grades at St. John School, Dayton. She also taught primary grades at St. Mark, Shakopee. From 1964 through her retirement in 1989, she alternated her service in the areas of teacher aide, catechetical work, home service, parish visitor and home health aide in a number of locations. Included in her service were Holy Family, Clarkston and St. Joseph, Spokane, both in Washington; St. Mary, New England, SS. Peter & Paul, New Hradec, and St. Patrick and St. Wenceslaus, Dickinson, all in North Dakota; and in Minnesota, St. Bonaventure Catechetical School, Bloomington, St. Mary, Worthington, and Good Counsel Academy and Convent, Mankato.

- MORE -

Notre Dame of Dallas  
PO Box 227275  
Dallas, TX 75222-7275  
214-845-7418

Notre Dame of Elm Grove  
13105 Watertown Plank Road  
Elm Grove, WI 53122-2291  
262-782-9850

Our Lady of Good Counsel  
170 Good Counsel Drive  
Mankato, MN 56001-3138  
507-389-4200

Sancta Maria in Ripa  
320 East Ripa Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63125-2897  
314-633-7005

St. Mary of the Pines  
3167 Old Highway 51 S  
Osyka, MS 39657-7056  
601-783-3494

In 1989, Sister Mary Elsa moved to Good Counsel. Reflecting on her life at the time of her seventieth Jubilee in 2010, she described her days at Good Counsel in this way, “To fill my days, I pray, attend daily mass, take daily walks, visit the sick, read, do hobbies, help with a variety of little chores, take naps and keep in touch with all the family who have been so good to me. I will always have good memories about them. God bless them all and take care of them.”

As the years passed, Sister Mary Elsa often expressed the desire to go home to God, especially when another sister died. In her 2010 Jubilee reflection, she continued, “I am most grateful to God for all He has given me. Best of all, I am getting ready as I am on my last journey to heaven. I thank God for all that has been, and leave the future in God’s hands.”

The Funeral Liturgy, with Father Eugene Stenzel as presider, was held Wednesday, October 25 in Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial of her cremains in Good Counsel Cemetery. She is survived by her sister, Elsie Franchuk, nieces and nephews and their families, friends, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and SSND Associates. She was preceded in death by her parents, Frank and Mary (Stranik) Bren, her brothers, Louie, Albert, Anton, Charles, William and Jerry, and her sisters, Barbara Mehulky and Eleanore Pavlicek. Two brothers, Frank and George, and one sister, Lillian, died in infancy. 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](http://www.ssndcentralpacific.org/Partner/Donation).

# # #