

Sister Johnel Ruder, CSA

Sister Johnel (Anna Marie) Ruder, CSA, 87, died on Wednesday, March 17, 2010, in St. Francis Home where she resided.

Anna Marie, born on September 17, 1922, was one of fifteen children born to John and Anna Ruder in Hays, Kansas. Though four of the children died in childhood, the other four boys and seven girls grew up on the Ruder farm. Educated by the Sisters of St. Agnes at St. Joseph's School in Hays, two of the girls entered the Congregation at young ages. So it was that in 1937, 15-year-old Anna joined her elder sister, who had been professed as Sister Agnessa five years earlier in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.



The early years of convent training included a high school education and even some experience of teaching in Marytown, Wisconsin. Early on, Anna showed her artistic side by forming and leading a harmonica choir formed of nearly 50 of her sisters-in-training. On August 15, 1942, Anna made her first profession of vows as Sister Johnel, the name she had received as a novice. Sister Johnel's first assignment was as teacher and parish organist in Hudson, Wisconsin. For the next 37 years she taught mostly middle- and junior high students in Wisconsin, Kansas, Indiana, and Illinois, even serving as principal in Victoria, Kansas. Over the years she earned a B.S. in Elementary Education from Marian College of Fond du Lac and an M.S. in Elementary Education Administration from Fort Hays State in Hays, Kansas. Students remember Sister Johnel as a firm and creative teacher whose kind and caring ways drew them to her.

In 1977 when failing health necessitated leaving the classroom, Sister Johnel continued serving others in various capacities: tutoring, serving as a secretary-receptionist, volunteering in a mission warehouse, caring for and counseling the aged. She retired in 1992 to Nazareth Heights, later moving to Nazareth Court/Center and St. Francis Home.

Other Sisters who lived with Sister Johnel experienced her as a down-to-earth, no-nonsense woman whose practical spirituality made her a kind, caring, and comforting presence. She could, nevertheless, both enjoy and play practical jokes with and from those she knew well. Although she treasured her privacy, she enjoyed visits with her beloved family and being with other people. At St. Francis Home, she liked to sit in the visiting space to greet and be greeted by those who passed by. Ever the farm girl from her early years, she loved animals and beamed when she saw a dog trotting through the halls. Sister Johnel ended her life much as she had lived it: quietly and peacefully passing into the arms of the God she had loved and served through loving and serving others.

Sister Johnel is survived by a brother-in-law, Walter Klaus of Hays, KS; many nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews; and the Sisters of St. Agnes with whom she lived, prayed, and ministered.

Preceding her in death are her parents, John and Anna Stoecklein Ruder; seven brothers: Theobald, Earl, August, Robert, three brothers who died in childhood; and seven sisters: Dorothy, Albina, Florentine, Marcella, Sister Agnessa Ruder CSA, Bernice Klaus, and one sister who died as a child.

Visitation: Visitation for Sister Johnel will be held on Friday, March 19, from 3:00 to 7:30 p.m. and on Saturday, March 20, from 8:00 to 9:15 a.m. at Nazareth Court and Center, 375 Gillett Street, Fond du Lac. A prayer service will be held on Friday at 6:30 p.m.

Services: A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Saturday, March 20, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. in the St. Francis Home Chapel, 33 Everett Street, Fond du Lac. Father Ken Smits, OFM.Cap. will preside. Burial will follow at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery.

Memorials may be directed to the Sisters of St. Agnes Development Office, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac, WI 54935.

The Sisters of St. Agnes are grateful to the nurses and staff of Nazareth Center and of St. Francis Home for their care of Sister Johnel in her retirement years and to the staff of Hospice Hope for their support in these last weeks.