

Sister Mary Dennis McMahon, CSA

Sister Mary Dennis McMahon, CSA, baptized Mary Therese, died peacefully at St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin on September 22, 2020. Mary Therese was born in Chicago, IL, on April 25, 1928, the oldest of five surviving children, four daughters and one son, in the family of Dennis Francis McMahon and Bridie Margaret Guthrie. When Mary Therese was fifteen, the family sadly lost their mother during childbirth. While she completed high school at Immaculate Conception High School, Elmhurst, IL, Mary Therese helped her father raise her siblings. With the resourcefulness that characterized her throughout her life, she divided the household responsibilities with her next oldest sister, each one managing the tasks which best suited her ability.



Having sensed a call to religious life early on, she was particularly inspired by the spirit of the Sisters of St. Agnes, her high school teachers. Mary Therese entered St. Agnes Convent, Fond du Lac, WI, after graduation in 1946 and, as Sister Mary Dennis, made profession of vows in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes on August 15, 1949.

Her lifelong ministry of education took her to Catholic parish schools in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Indiana. She received her BS in Education from Marian College of Fond du Lac and her MS in Elementary Education from Fordham University, Bronx, NY; she earned numerous post-graduate credits in Administration from Manhattan College, NY, and Catholic University, Washington, DC. Well-prepared professionally and with a natural gift for administration, Sister dedicated herself to teaching at all grades levels in elementary school and served as principal both in grade school and high school for more than fifty years. From 1980-1982, she served as Associate Superintendent of the Fort Wayne-South diocesan schools. Perhaps the most challenging position, as well as a greatly rewarding one for Sister, was assuming principalship of St. Joseph Elementary School in Chicago in 1988. This school, located near the Cabrini Green public housing units, offered at-risk students a quality education and required total engagement of the staff to accomplish the task. In this final administrative role, Sister's efforts to develop a space of welcome and belonging for children and their parents were the culmination of a life of leading and learning, of personal investment in the creation of a climate where children, teachers, and staff might grow in becoming their best selves.

Always a community-oriented woman, upon her retirement as an educator in 2001, Sister Mary Dennis remained in Chicago where while living with another Sister of St. Agnes she delighted in providing childcare during the day for two adopted children while their single mother served as principal in a local Catholic school. In 2005 she moved to Fond du Lac to be a resident at Nazareth Court and Center where she assisted other sisters as she was able

and tutored Marian University students until her frail health no longer permitted these volunteer activities.

Sister Mary Dennis was preceded in death by her parents, Dennis Francis McMahon and Bridie Margaret McMahon; her brother Vincent; and her sisters Margaret Frances McMahon, Joan Detloff and Isabelle DaPrato. She is survived by her nieces and nephews and by the Sisters of St. Agnes, with whom she lived, prayed, and ministered.

Cremation has taken place. Because of current COVID-19 restrictions, the Liturgy of Christian Burial will be held in private services at Nazareth Court and Center, Fond du Lac, WI, with Father Ken Smits, Capuchin, presiding. Burial will be in St. Joseph Springs Cemetery, Fond du Lac, WI.

Memorials can be directed to the Sisters of St. Agnes Mission Advancement Office, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac, WI 54937.

The Sisters of St. Agnes are grateful to the nurses and staff of Nazareth Court and Center who cared for Sister Mary Dennis in her final years, and to all who provided care for her at St. Agnes Hospital.

Zacherl Funeral Home is serving the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes.