

We of Nojoshing

Nojoshing – Indian word for the area where our pioneer members settled in 1849; it means "piece of land stretching into the water." The name was changed later to Saint Francis, Wisconsin.



Newsletter of The New Assisi Archives of the
SISTERS of ST. FRANCIS of ASSISI, 3221 South Lake Drive, St. Francis, WI 53235-3799

We celebrate the memory of our beloved Sister Cynthia (Theresa) Marek December 9, 1927 – May 28, 2023

Sister Cynthia, who was baptized Theresa, was the daughter of Richard and Marie (Koehler) Marek, natives of Czechoslovakia. She was born in Greenwood, Wis. Theresa entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi as an aspirant and completed high school at St. Mary's Academy in 1945. When Theresa became a novice in 1947, she received the name Sister Cynthia. Later, she would more familiarly be known as Sister Cindy.

In 1948, as a second-year novice, Sister Cindy began her teaching ministry at St. Mary School in South Milwaukee, Wis., as a third-grade teacher. She made profession of vows in August 1949, and that fall began a five-year stay at St. Gertrude School in Franklin Park, Ill., where she taught fourth grade. When she moved to St. Anthony grade school in Sterling, Colo., in 1954, she taught a combined first- and second-grade class.

Leaving Colorado in 1957, Sister Cindy's next three assignments were as a first-grade teacher at St. Anthony School in Park Falls, Wis., from 1957 to 1959; St. John School in Savanna, Ill., from 1959 to 1964; and St. Joseph School in Stevens Point, Wis., from 1964 to 1966. At St. Frederick School in Cudahy, Wis., Sister Cynthia taught fourth grade from 1966 until 1969 when she moved to Sacred Heart School in Saint Francis, Wis., where she was an intermediate grade teacher until 1977, and then transitioned to being a reading specialist and working with students with learning disabilities until 1983. Her last teaching position was in Sun Prairie, Wis., where she taught for three years.

During the first 24 years of Sister Cindy's grade-school teaching career, she worked part-time at getting her college education. She received a bachelor of arts degree in education from Cardinal Stritch College in 1962 and a master of arts degree in education in 1972, also from Stritch. At the end of 38 years of teaching, Sister Cindy recognized the need for a change and went to Seattle University in 1986-1987 to study for parish ministry. Returning to Milwaukee, she took a position as pastoral minister at St. Augustine Parish in Milwaukee. After two years she went to Immaculate Conception Parish in Burlington, Wis., as pastoral associate for one year and then as pastoral associate at St. Mary's Parish in Burlington for nine years.

Pastoral ministry provided Sister Cindy with opportunities to build relationships in the parish, especially among the elderly. She recognized their needs, both materially and spiritually. In addition to personal contact, she chose to get involved in other organizations on committees and boards so she could direct seniors to resources in a variety of areas. Four of these organizations were: St. Vincent de Paul; Love, Inc.; S.A.L.T (Seniors and Lawmen together) and the Senior Center in Burlington.

To assist herself in ministry, she served on the Hospital Ethics Committee, the Human Concerns Committee, the Hospice Alliance Committee, and the Burlington Association of Area Churches (Treasurer).

What Sister Cindy learned and experienced she channeled to others through the quality of her presence. Her presence was described by others as supportive, strong, sensitive, positive, steady and more. She touched lives with the sparkle in her eyes, the wisdom of living religious life and caring deeply. In 1994, she was nominated for the *Wisconsin's Ten Most Admired Senior Citizen Award*. Though she did not receive the award, the judges issued her a Special Commendation.

In 1999, Sister Cindy retired from pastoral ministry and looked forward to a quiet life, but she said a phone call changed all that. She agreed to move to Baltimore for a year to live with the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore who were in the process of discerning merger with the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. Sister Cindy's presence among them would give them the opportunity to get to know a Sister from Milwaukee and vice versa. Sister Cindy said that she never felt like a stranger or outsider but rather felt very much a part of the Sisters' lives in Baltimore.

And the Sisters in Baltimore related that Sister Cindy brought a sense of peace, quiet and joy to everything she did, along with a bit of sunshine even on the dreariest of days. Sister Cindy celebrated her Golden Jubilee of profession just before going to Baltimore and she reflected on her life.

Religious life made it possible for me to fully embrace life, and in that embrace to find fulfillment in God. As a Franciscan teacher, I felt I was able to influence students to make good choices in their own lives. To the older adults, as a pastoral associate, I represented the Church in a special way as a Franciscan Sister.

In 2001, Sister Cindy returned to Milwaukee and lived at Clare Hall. She was an active volunteer but developing health issues necessitated a move to St. Francis Convent in 2006. In 2019, she moved, with all of the other Sisters, into the new St. Francis Convent. Her health had its ups and downs since 2021, and she had more than her share of health issues.

On May 26, Father Tom Suriano anointed Sister Cindy. As the Church was celebrating the feast of Pentecost on May 28 and the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi were celebrating 174 years of foundation, God called Sister Cindy home to celebrate and enjoy into the fullness of eternal life. Sister Kathleen Denevan witnessed Sister Cindy's peaceful death.

Sister Cindy's presence was a gift she shared freely. Now it is God who is gifting her for all eternity. *"And God said, my presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest."*

(Exodus 33:14)

~ †Sister Marie Colette Roy and Sister Marcia Lunz