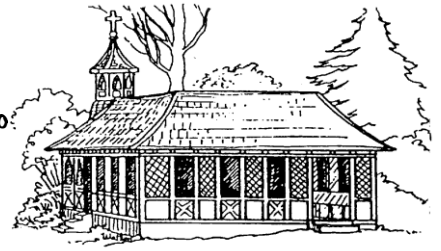


We of Nojoshing

Nojoshing – Indian word for the area where our pioneers 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, Saint Francis, WI 53235-3799

We celebrate the memory of our beloved Sister Generose (Mary) Willkomm December 28, 1925 – November 3, 2024

Mary Willkomm was born to Nicholas and Josephine (Neu) in Paris, Wis., the twelfth of 16 children. She was baptized on January 3, 1926, at St. John the Baptist Church in Paris (Kenosha County) and grew up with her family on a farm outside of Paris. Sister Generose wrote that “at our house, life was simple. [My childhood] was happy, filled with love as we took care of each other. Each member of the Willkomm clan was looked upon as a gift from God.”

Mary’s early school days were spent at Hawthorne School on Highway 142, where Mrs. Ruth Danielson was a beloved teacher. In fourth grade she “made the big switch” to St. John the Baptist School in Paris/Union Grove, Wis., where our Sisters were her teachers. She made her First Communion in 1935 and was confirmed in 1939. After graduating from eighth grade at age 13, she entered the Aspirancy in our congregation in September 1939.

Mary attended St. Mary’s Academy as an aspirant and postulant. After a year as a postulant, she became a novice in 1943 and received the name Sister Mary Gen-

erose. This was followed by her first profession of vows in 1945 and final vows in 1948.

Ever since her early days in the convent, the readings of John Cardinal Henry Newman had a great influence on her of the daily movement of life toward death. In addition, she was devoted to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha and thought that she, too, would die young.

She wanted to be a missionary in China, but never realized that desire. Her missionary activity took place in numerous Catholic elementary school classrooms, primarily as a teacher, with one assignment as a principal. Between 1945 and 1995 Sister Generose’s missions included St. Mary, South Milwaukee, Wis.; St. Gertrude, Franklin Park, Ill.; St. Andrew, Delavan, Wis.; and St. John, Longmont, Colo. In 1964, she lived at St. Aemilian’s in Milwaukee and took courses at Marquette University. She was then missioned to SS Peter and Paul School in Peterstown, Ill., where she taught for eight years and served as the principal. She returned to St. Mary’s, South Milwaukee, at the time of the Vatican II Council. In 1988, she was among

26 teachers who were honored by the Milwaukee Archdiocesan League of Home and School Associations.

Although former students remember Sister Generose as a strict disciplinarian, friends and family found her engaging and enjoyable to be with. Close family ties were evident until she died.

In the course of those years in active teaching, she earned two degrees from Cardinal Stritch University: a bachelor of philosophy-English degree in 1953 and a master's degree in education in 1983. Other studies led Sister Generose into theology and spirituality. She wrote that, beginning in the 1960s, she "moved from the Readers Digest to authors like St. John of the Cross, Karl Rahner, and Thomas of Aquinas." The Second Vatican Council and the changes that came about were very challenging for Sister Generose; but she said that she read and studied hard, and worked to find a balance between what had been and what was evolving while keeping her free spirit.

Sister Generose wrote that her interest lay in bettering society through justice and equality. Her hobbies included reading and keeping up with world news, and her skill lay in being able to get things done. She was inspired by "always seeking TRUTH and viewing life as a journey of challenges."

On the occasion of her 70th Jubilee (2015) and 75th Jubilee (2020), she reflected:

My religious life has been a journey of challenges. Jesus has always been my mentor and my guide. In my quest for TRUTH, I find Jesus, not only in the Eucharist, but I also see Jesus' goodness in all of nature and in every person I meet. "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." (St. Augustine) "My God and my All."

I believe a Jubilee is a time to say "THANKS" to God for all that has been, and for all that will be, "YES." I do not know the future, but I do know who holds the future in his Providential hands.
DEUS PROVIDEBIT.

Concluding her years of ministry with lighter teaching assignments, Sister Generose retired to Clare Hall in 2006 and moved with the Sisters into the new St. Francis Convent in 2019. Her thoughts of dying at a young age were not realized. God called her home on November 3, 2024, at the age of 98. Father Jim Schroeder, SCJ, had anointed her on November 1. Sisters Eleanor Riordon and Sylvia Anne Sheldon were with her when she died peacefully.

During her retreat in 1997, she wrote her autobiography, beginning and ending it with quotations from Blessed John Henry Newman: "All will turn to good if I have Jesus with me, yesterday and today the same, and forever."