

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 St. 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 Valerie (Phyllis) Sepenski August 25, 1937 – December 5, 2021

"I learned to like all the things I was asked to do."

Sister Valerie, who was baptized Phyllis, was born in Racine, Wis., to Stanley and Valeria (Saszewski) Sepenski. When Phyllis was eight years old, the family moved to Milwaukee, after which her sister, Eleanor, and brother, Jerome, were born. Phyllis attended SS. Cyril and Methodius School and St. Gerard School. Sister Laurita Hahn (+1992), the principal at St. Gerard, helped Phyllis obtain a scholarship to St. Mary's Academy. Phyllis became an aspirant as a junior. When she entered the novitiate on August 11, 1955, Phyllis received the name Sister Valerie in honor of her mother.

As a second-year novice, Sister Valerie taught primary grades at St. Agnes, Milwaukee. She professed vows in 1957, and returned to St. Agnes for another year. She also taught primary grades at St. Gertrude School in Franklin Park, Ill.; St. Dominic School in Sheboygan, Wis.; St. Francis of Assisi School in Rockwell City, Iowa; and St. Sebastian, Milwaukee. During her oral-history interview, Sister Valerie acknowledged that she had wanted to be a music teacher, but was unwilling to go to the major superior and ask to do so. She did serve as organist at Rockwell City in addition to teaching.

Sister Valerie completed her bachelor's degree at Cardinal Stritch University in 1969. In 1975, she earned her master's degree in theology from the Aquinas Institute in Dubuque, Iowa, and then served as a member of the formation team for our Congregation for four years. During that time, she joined other English-speaking formation directors from around the world on a pilgrimage to Assisi, sponsored by the International Franciscan Conference of the Third Order Regular. Sister Valerie then taught at St. Ann School, Milwaukee, 1979-1983. For the next two years, she assisted with driving and clerical work at the Motherhouse.

From 1985-2000, Sister Valerie was the director of religious education and eventually a pastoral

assistant at St. Gall Parish in Elburn, Ill. The neighboring area developed rapidly and the number of parishioners grew dramatically during her time there. Working with lay men and women and experiencing their deep faith left a lasting impression on her, and paved the way for her accepting the role as Director of Associate Relationship in the Congregation from 2000-2007. Her formation work, religious education and pastoral ministry inspired her to focus the formation of Associates on developing their lay spirituality, which continues to this day.

In 2007, Sister Valerie lived at Casa Chiara and directed the volunteer program at the Motherhouse. Her own volunteer work included shopping for the retired Sisters, keeping their personal things in order, and listening to their many stories. She had time to deepen her own spiritual exploration of the universe and its mysteries, reading articles and watching any program she could find on this topic. At Casa Chiara she did the shopping and kept the house in order for her Sisters in full-time ministry. Recognizing her increasing limitations, she made the decision to move to Clare Hall in 2018, and to the Motherhouse later that year in order to receive more supportive care. She continued her ministry of prayer and presence to all that she had come to know and love.

During her 60th Jubilee Celebration in 2017, Sister Valerie reflected on the "blessings upon blessings" she had received. She wrote, "All these years I have been gifted by women with whom I have shared community. God's gifts were given and shared generously. These women have shared their deepening search for God; their enthusiasm for knowledge; their gifts of music and art; their gifts of mind and heart." These many gifts were but a reflection of what Sister Valerie gave to all those who knew and loved her. She now rests in peace, contemplating the Divine Creator of the Universe.

~ Marie Colette Roy, OSF, and Joanne Schatzlein, OSF