

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 Clarinda (Marie) Zech August 27, 1922 – December 21, 2021

Marie Zech was born at home on a farm in Elkhorn, Wis., to Albert and Thecla (Ganser) Zech. She had a younger brother and sister. Marie attended St. Joseph School in Fort Atkinson, where our Sisters “left a lasting impression” on her. When her eighth-grade teacher asked her when she was going to go to the convent, Marie began to do some serious thinking. “I attribute my vocation to the fine example of my aunts, Sisters Claudiana (†1989) and Irene (†2004) Ganser.” Marie entered our congregation on September 3, 1936. There were only four aspirants that year, so they were grouped with the postulants. Marie received her high school education at St. Mary’s Academy and attended St. Clare College as a postulant.

Marie became a novice on August 11, 1940, and received the name, Sister Clarinda. She professed vows in 1942 and was sent to teach fourth grade at Sacred Heart School in St. Francis, Wis., a year she remembered as a difficult one; “I would be happy on Friday!” The following year she taught what she described as a “great” fourth grade at St. Agnes, Milwaukee. Sadly, in the spring of that year, one of her pupils died and then she was called home because of her mother’s serious health condition.

In June 1944 Sister Clarinda began a long tenure in special education. She volunteered to work with the mentally handicapped partly because of the friendliness and dedication of the Sisters at St. Coletta in Jefferson, where Sister Claudiana had ministered for many years. Sister Clarinda was a teacher and group mother at St. Coletta’s of the Rockies in Longmont, Colo., and continued after the school relocated to Palos Park, Ill., in January 1949, and became known as the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., School. Later that year in July, Sister Clarinda completed her bachelor’s degree at Cardinal Stritch College.

For 17 years, Sister Clarinda ministered at the Kennedy School in Palos Park, teaching, testing students, and being a group mother. She later wrote, “Most of all I’m grateful for my spiritual growth attained during those years through the beautiful Sisters I lived with, especially Sisters Romuald Nolz (†1995), Mary Inez Wagner (†1975), and Pierre Mertens (†1993).”

Sister Clarinda moved to St. Coletta School (now Cardinal Cushing Centers) in Hanover, Mass., in 1966. She and Sister Eleanor Riordan were both new there and shared duties in the same department as well as the challenges of getting to know the students and their parents.

In order to continue her testing work, Sister Clarinda took graduate courses at Boston State College and Bridgewater State College to become certified as a school psychologist. Her very full schedule was interrupted in July of 1973 when she fell and broke her hip. She was hospitalized for seven weeks and did not teach during the fall semester.

As time moved on, there were more evaluations of students and required reports so Sister Clarinda discontinued teaching in September 1974 to devote more time to the work of evaluation. However, she still continued to train Mass servers and to minister as a part-time child care worker in addition

to her work as the school psychologist. “It is my hope that in so doing I am spreading the ‘Good News.’”

Sister Clarinda’s mobility was never the same after she broke her hip and with age, walking became more difficult. In 1983, she made the decision to discontinue helping with child care in the residences because she was concerned she could not move quickly enough if there were an emergency evacuation. The administration and staff threw a surprise party for her in gratitude for the 17 years of service she had given in child care and gave her a test kit to use with children who had limited speech.

In 1990 she was honored as Employee of the Year. Students wrote, “Dear Sister Clarinda, You are more than a teacher to us. You are a friend. We dedicate our yearbook to you, with love.” In June 2008, a Peace Garden was dedicated to all of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi who had served in Hanover. This coincided with the departure of Sisters Clarinda Zech and Magdalena Paul (†2021) after 42 years of service that each had given in Hanover.

Sister Clarinda’s selfless nature extended into other areas of service. In the 1980s, she began to work with the school archives because she wanted to have a more complete record of the Cardinal Cushing Centers’ history. In between all of her other duties, she started by cutting articles from newspapers and organizing them chronologically in photo albums. Her thought was that the material would then be helpful to anyone who wrote the history of the Centers. It turned out that she wrote the history. She said that “though I ministered in Hanover for 42 years as teacher, group mother and school psychologist, the task of writing St. Coletta School’s history took 12 years.”

This monumental task, begun in 2000, was finished long distance after Sister Clarinda moved to Milwaukee in 2008 for health reasons. Her Hanover helpers, Margaret Lelakes and Linda Hurley, sent materials to her as needed and then Sister returned them. In the final stages, Sister Celia Struck, the archivist for the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, assisted with the typing, indexing, editing, photo selection and preparation for printing. The publication of *A History of St. Coletta Schools of Massachusetts* was celebrated on December 20, 2012.

When Sister Clarinda celebrated her 70th jubilee of profession in 2012, she reflected that “as a religious I had opportunities for a better prayer life through daily liturgies, retreats, special feast day celebrations and the friendship of my fellow religious. In my ministry, I was energized seeing the progress and hearing the success of our developmentally disabled students.”

At the time of her 75th jubilee of profession in 2017, Sister Clarinda wrote: “My 75 years were happy years. I greatly appreciated the opportunity of preparing the children and adults for receiving the sacraments. And also, for helping the students so that they could be successfully employed. In my retirement years, I have more time for prayer and meditation and in striving to follow the ways of St. Francis.”

Those who knew Sister Clarinda marveled at her keen memory and the enjoyable stories she shared with loads of detail of names and places. Her sense of humor was appreciated and her smile was welcoming to all.

When notable signs of physical decline were noted in mid-December, the Transitus Service was prayed with and for Sister Clarinda. Sisters began keeping vigil with her on December 16 until God called her home on December 21, 2021, at St. Francis Convent. Sister Regine Ehm was present when Sister Clarinda entered into eternal life.

Sister Clarinda worked hard and long in her lifetime and knew what was hers to do. May we, like her, follow the words of St. Peter: “*Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourselves at the service of others.*” *1 Peter 4:10*