

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.



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SISTERS of ST. FRANCIS of ASSISI, 3221 South Lake Drive, St. Francis, WI 53235-3799

We celebrate the memory of our beloved Sister Irene Kunding Formerly Sister Mary Narcissa April 27, 1925 – August 21, 2022

Sister Irene Kunding was born in Park Falls, Wis., to Frank and Frances (Kronberger) Kunding. She grew up on the Kunding family farm, the oldest of seven girls and four boys. For the first five years of elementary school, Irene walked down the driveway and across the road to a one-room schoolhouse, Woodland Echo School. In addition to the instruction for her grade, she said she learned a lot by listening to the lessons taught to the other grades.

Beginning with 6th grade, she walked two-and-a-half miles to Park Falls to St. Anthony School, where she met our Sisters, and, after 8th grade graduation, attended Lincoln High School for two years. Ever since primary school, Sister Irene said she felt a call to be a Sister. In 1941, she entered the Aspirancy of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi and went to St. Mary's Academy as a junior. As a postulant, she completed her senior year of high school.

Irene was received as a novice on August 11, 1943, and was given the name Sister Mary Narcissa. (After Vatican Council II she went back to her baptismal name.) On August 12, 1945, Sister Narcissa professed first vows and began her teaching ministry that fall. From 1945 to 1957 she taught primary grades at Sacred Heart of Jesus and St. Agnes, Milwaukee; and middle grades in Lyons, Fredonia, and Jefferson (St. John), Wis. Sister Irene continued her education part-time and graduated from Cardinal Stritch College (now University) in 1955 with a bachelor's degree in education/biology.

In 1957, Sister Irene made a transition from elementary education to special education of the mentally handicapped and taught at St. Coletta of Wisconsin in Jefferson. In 1962, she received a master of arts degree in special education from Cardinal Stritch University and moved to Cardinal Cushing Centers in Hanover, Mass., in 1963 as a special education teacher until 1969 when she moved to Braintree, Mass., as a teacher and psychology testing administrator. She earned further certifications at Bridgewater State College in special education, how to work with emotionally disturbed students, and guidance counseling. At Boston University, she earned certification as a school psychologist.

In response to an invitation Sister Irene received to go to Taiwan for two years to help develop special education programs for teachers and students, her response was "yes." In true missionary spirit, this tall American woman who spoke with a strong voice, left for an unknown country and people. She arrived in April 1972 and found there were few resources available for special-needs students who carried a social stigma because of their disabilities. Her initial two years turned into 41 years of service.

Once the decision was made that Sister Irene would stay on in Taiwan, she studied the Mandarin Chinese language full-time so she could communicate effectively. Learning the language was difficult. Determined, as always, Sister Irene practiced her Chinese words out loud any chance she had, in the house and outdoors. Her fear of making a mistake was minimal because she always felt someone would correct her. Her efforts to communicate with others was greatly appreciated and helped to widen her circle of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Sister Irene realized how much speaking the language of the people gave her a deeper experience of being with them.

Sister Irene worked first in the Catholic Kuang Jen Elementary and Junior High Schools in Taipei. After St. Joseph Center for Special Education was established in 1975, her teaching expanded to five centers where she spent one day a week at each one. Evenings she taught English to adults at the Archdiocesan Sacred Heart Institute. In 2003, the Department of Internal Affairs in Taiwan approved her “Alien Permanent Residence Certificate” and cited her long devotion to Taiwan.

For 10 years, Sister Irene edited the English *One Spirit* magazine for men and women religious. During the course of her tenure in Taiwan, she attended 20 international conferences throughout Asia which focused on working with persons with intellectual disabilities in Asian countries as well as many meetings and conferences within Taiwan. She was a lifelong learner. She loved her work and felt deeply the inherent goodness of every student and parent she encountered.

In 2013, health issues brought Sister Irene back to Milwaukee. There were about 50 people at the Taipei airport to say goodbye and send her off in first-class style. The tall, stately, now white-haired woman had endeared herself to all she had met, and they to her. No one will ever be able to count the ways in which she helped those once shunned by society to develop and grow into the full potential that was theirs.

Those who knew Sister Irene know that she wanted things done very well and correctly. Professionally, the high expectations she set for herself she also set for others but she was also always ready to join in on the fun, a party, a sightseeing trip, a movie, and more.

After returning to the States, Sister Irene’s ministry was “prayer and kindness.” In 2020, she reflected on her 75th Jubilee with these words, “Since the day I entered the convent on August 28, 1942, the convent has been most solicitous for me in the love of God, spiritual ways, food, and in every way I can think of.”

Sister Irene’s condition started to change in early May and a fall in mid-May necessitated a trip to the hospital. After a few days of treatment, she rallied and returned to Clare Circle at St. Francis Convent; but her system could not maintain stability. She grew more frail and slept into eternal life when God called her on August 21, 2022.

“I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41: 9-10 *New International Version*

~ †Sister Marie Colette Roy, OSF and Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF