

# 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.



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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 Verna (Leona) Kayser October 9, 1927 – October 12, 2022**

Leona Lucy was born on a farm near Emery, S.D. – the daughter of Felix and Sophia (Krier) Kayser. She was the fifth of 10 children. When she became of school age, Leona boarded during the week at St. Martin's Grade School in Emery. Leona was impressed with our Sisters, particularly Sister Sabina Habberger (†1963), who was "like a second mother" to the pupils. It was the Sisters' example of joy-filled and enthusiastic teaching that inspired her to leave Emery and journey to Milwaukee, Wis., in 1941 to attend St. Mary's Academy as an aspirant.

After graduating from St. Mary's Academy, Leona entered our congregation on August 28, 1944. When she became a novice on August 11, 1945, Leona received the name Sister Mary Verna. Remembering her Emery mentors, Sister Verna wanted to continue the legacy of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. Her ministry of teaching began shortly after professing vows on August 12, 1947.

Sister Verna first taught third grade at both Delavan, Wis., (1947-1955) and then at St. Veronica, Milwaukee (1955-1956). Sister Verna then headed east and taught five years (1956-1960) at St. Coletta School in Hanover, Mass. She found her niche working with children who had special needs. Also during this time, she completed her bachelor's degree (1958) at Cardinal Stritch University, chiefly during summer sessions. Upon returning to Wisconsin, Sister Verna briefly taught middle grades at Random Lake.

In 1956, Bishop Atkielski approached the Mother General asking her to provide a teacher for St. Coletta Day School, housed in St. Sebastian School, Milwaukee. Early in 1961, Sister Verna replaced Sister Francis Borgia Hofschulte as teacher and administrator. This was the beginning of a 30-year love story with the children who attended St. Coletta Day School, a special-education program for children aged eight to 16. In 1982, Sister Verna was recognized by the Milwaukee Common Council for her 20 years of ministry at St. Coletta Day School.

A phrase Sister Verna often associated with her ministry was, "It takes a village to raise a child...." The school's presence within the walls of St. Sebastian continues as a testimony. Sister Verna also completed a master's degree in special education (1965) at Cardinal Stritch University. Throughout these years, she served on various boards of organizations that ministered to the needs of children and young adults with special needs.

After leaving the Day School, Sister Verna spent a sabbatical year living at St. Veronica Convent, 1991–1992. She heard a calling to return to St. Coletta, but this time in Jefferson, Wis., providing clerical assistance from 1992–1999. Upon retiring, Sister Verna moved to Clare Hall in Saint Francis, Wis. She volunteered to clean and repair jewelry in the retail department for St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care. Sister Verna saw this ministry as a practical way to help clients pay for their expenses.

In 1997, Sister Verna celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her profession. She reflected, “My life has been a continuous opportunity to grow closer to God to whom I gave my life 50 years ago. I have never regretted that choice.” Her brother, Father Leonard Kayser (†2015) being the celebrant of the Jubilee Mass brought great joy to Sister Verna.

Shortly after this time, Sister Verna moved to St. Francis Community, located at the Motherhouse, for additional health care. Her ministry became one of prayer and presence. Again in 2007, time for a jubilee celebration was at hand. The Class of 1947 was celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee! “My life has been a spiritual journey. The journey was one I enjoyed as I reflect now. God has been with me all the way,” she wrote. A card Sister Verna received had this message: “Our relationship with Christ makes ALL the difference and your commitment of 60 years has made all kinds of difference in those whom you taught! Thank you for your gift of fidelity and commitment.”

This year of 2022 celebrated 75 years of faithful commitment for Sister Verna and two of her classmates.

THANK YOU, Verna, for your gentle and “always calm presence, regardless of the circumstances.” We know our Loving God has welcomed you home, and you rest in peace forever.

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.  
His love endures forever.*

Psalm 136

†Marie Colette Roy, OSF  
Celia Struck, OSF