



Sisters of St. Casimir

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SISTER THERESE BERNADETTE ZEBRAUSKAS

(formerly known as Sister Ronald)

February 24, 1928 – May 10, 2019

Sister Therese Bernadette Zebrauskas (formerly Sister Ronald) was born on February 24, 1928, in Chicago to Constantine and Frances Zebrauskas. She was the fifth of eight children. Both of her parents had come from Kalvarija, Lithuania, to the United States because of pre-World War I tensions arising in Europe.

The family lived across the street from the All Saints Parish in the Roseland neighborhood of Chicago. Except for three years, Sister Therese attended the parish school. Sister Therese said the Sisters of St. Casimir who were teachers there had a great influence on her. In reflecting on her vocation, Sister Therese attributed it to her mother's prayers and the example of her life.

Sister Therese attended St. Casimir Academy for her high school years. The closeness with the Sisters of St. Casimir there strengthened her resolve for a religious vocation, and she asked to enter the community after graduating. The parish priest wrote one of the letters of recommendation, describing her as "a person of moral integrity and nobility of life." Sister Therese made her vows on August 15, 1949, and she had the joy of celebrating her Silver Jubilee in 1974 and her Golden Jubilee in 1999.

Preparing for her ministry as a teacher, Sister Therese earned a B.S. degree in education from Marywood in Scranton, PA, and later an M.A. degree in education from Loyola Chicago, IL. Additional accomplishments included earning a first aid certificate from the American Red Cross, which served her well in her work in the schools, and Lithuanian studies because the community at that time required knowing the Lithuanian language.

Sister Therese's journey in education would span 47 years. Her first seven years were dedicated to teaching children in grades 1-2, after which she was asked to move into middle grades 3-6. Over the 47 years, Sister Therese taught in a number of schools in several states: Immaculate Conception School, Nativity BVM School, St. Joseph School, St. Michael School, All Saints School, St. George School, and Providence of God School in Chicago; St. Norbert School in Northbrook, IL; St. Anthony School in Cicero, IL; St. Mary School in Plano, IL; St. John Vianney School in MN; St. Francis School in Indiana Harbor, IN; and Sts. Peter and Paul School in Rockford, IL.

While teaching at Providence of God School, Sister Therese also served as assistant principal for two years. The school was always open to innovative methods of education, and in 1981-82 Sister Therese was part of a pilot program in language arts. Sister Therese was loved by the children and had a compassionate heart for the ones who, for various reasons, were finding it difficult to fit in.

After experiencing health issues, Sister Therese retired from teaching and began a second career in 1996 as a receptionist at Maria High School, a ministry she served in until she moved to the Motherhouse in 2011. As a receptionist at the Visitors Entrance, she was the first person many teachers, students, and those visiting the school would see. Her kind, welcoming manner is something many remember. This position also required her to respond to the health care needs of students and to make copies for teachers and staff for their classes. Sister Therese loved her work because it gave her an opportunity to be involved with students and staff in a different capacity, one that enabled her to get to know them personally. Her gentle, kind, and respectful presence was appreciated by those who came to know her.

When the community began the move to Franciscan Village in Lemont, IL, Sister Therese chose to live at Our Lady of Victory Convent. There she enjoyed the beautiful spirit of community that Sister Bernadette Marie Janus encouraged as their coordinator. Sister Johanna Marie Shainaukskas, who was part of the little community there, said that what impressed her about Sister Therese is that she always stopped to talk and listen to the other residents. "It wasn't just a hello. She stayed and listened to them. It was like a new ministry which seemed to come naturally."

As Sister Therese Bernadette's health declined, she made the move to Mother Theresa Home to receive additional care. It was a difficult adjustment, and Sister Therese once expressed to one of the Sisters that she was trying to accept what was happening in her life and to find God in it, but it wasn't easy.

Sister Therese Bernadette was surrounded by the Sisters of St. Casimir who loved her and cared for her, and by a loving family, many nieces and nephews, and her sister Virginia, whom she called every day, in whom she confided, and in whose conversations she found a listening ear and an understanding heart. Sister Therese wrote the following at the time of her Golden Jubilee: "These words of Mother Maria express what I have tried to do over all these years of my religious life: 'May everything at all times direct us to our desired end: a greater love of God.'" That greater love of God is now fulfilled and experienced as Sister Therese has entered her heavenly home.