

# **Memento for Sister Irene Marie (Mercier), CSC (Phyllis Ann Mercier)**

January 31, 1929 - May 21, 2019

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**These memories were lovingly prepared by those who knew Sister Irene Marie (Mercier), CSC, and shared their reflections. They were written and read by Sister Karla McKinnie, CSC, at the funeral on May 29, 2019.**

Phyllis Ann Mercier, Sister Irene Marie (Mercier), CSC, was born in Hastings, Nebraska, on January 31, 1929, to Raimond Mercier and Irene LaPorte Mercier. Her sister, Priscilla, was born two years after her. Priscilla had 10 children who meant much to Sister Irene. They continued to keep in touch and visit throughout the years. They were a great support to her.

The Mercier family endured many challenges during the Great Depression. Her early education was in public schools in small towns of Nebraska. She received her religious education through catechism classes from the priest, her mother's instruction and vacation school with the Ursuline Sisters from Louisville, Kentucky. She was later able to attend St. Patrick's High School in North Platte, where she graduated in 1946.

Irene developed a love for music and dance from her mother. She loved a party. She stated, "When my sister and I were doing dishes, my mom would sing alto with us."

From 1946 until 1949 her work experience included being a long-distance telephone operator, laundry worker in a Catholic hospital, a clerk in a dime store, a soda fountain worker—and a lot of babysitting.

At age 20 she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1949, giving as her only motivation, "To acquire humility and unselfish service to God." Sister Irene Marie said that when she entered Holy Cross there was no room on campus, so they

were taken to Saint Mary's Academy, Twyckenham Hills, South Bend, Indiana, where Sister M. Amanda (Flannery), CSC, taught the famous artists and the color wheel. Sister M. Yvonne (Garrity), CSC, the piano teacher at St. Theodore School taught them music and the names of different instruments. This education made a big impression on Sister Irene Marie, building on her early love for music. She made her first profession in 1952 and final profession in 1955.

Sister Irene Marie received her bachelor's in education at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, and a master's in education at Saint Francis College in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This background prepared her for many years of service as a teacher in the Midwest from 1951 to 1976. Sister taught in nine different schools in Indiana and Illinois. She admitted that her favorite was St. Theodore School in Chicago. Living there, she became a lifelong Chicago Bears fan. Sister M. Esther (Black), CSC, stated that her brother Leonardo was taught by Sister Irene Marie, whom he said was a good teacher loved by the children. Later in life, when Sister Irene Marie had a chance meeting with Leonardo, she recognized him and called him by name.

Sister moved to the east in 1976 where she began a ministry of pastoral care in parishes and hospitals in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Alexandria, Virginia. During that time, she attended clinical pastoral education (CPE) classes at St. Paul Hospital in Dallas, Texas and De Sales School of Theology in Washington, D.C. In 1988, she moved to Colorado to help take care of her aging parents. She did chaplaincy work at St. Joseph Hospital in Denver, Colorado, and two other locations. Sister Geraldine Hoyler, CSC, stated "when she moved to pastoral care she was known for her care of stillborn infants or those who died shortly after birth. She brought the child beautifully wrapped so the parents could have time to be with this child in a meaningful way." Sister Irene Marie was always gracious, thinking of others. She said that hospital ministry was a blessing

for her because of her outgoing personality, sense of humor and an ability to have people feel comfortable around her. She said, “I am a good listener and this ministry is about listening to stories and telling stories. The patients and I are traveling together on a journey to God.” Sister Irene Marie touched many lives throughout her years of ministry, showing her awareness of the dignity of each person. Sister expressed gratitude for all her life experiences. She was a hard worker with an independent spirit. She did highlight one journey which she said she would never forget—in 2002 she had the opportunity to go on the Moreau trip.

Sister retired to Saint Mary’s in 2006 where she did volunteer services until her health declined. We are grateful for her life and willingness to acquire humility in unselfish service to God. I quote from a prayer Sister wrote in 2007: “so many times, you blessed the work of my hands and used them to bring your love to others. In the time I have left in this world, take my hands Lord and make them your hands. Let those I touch know they have been touched by you. May my hands give generously, bless lovingly, and soothe compassionately. May they be your healing hands to ease the pain of others. I give you my hands Lord. Jesus, use them as you please in your service. Amen.” Sister Irene Marie’s healing hands touched many people as an educator and a pastoral care minister. May she rest in peace.