



Sister Leona Gauer, OSB

Sister Leona (Bernice) Gauer, 80, of Mother of God Monastery, Watertown died Friday, July 11, 2014 (Feast of St. Benedict) in Sioux Falls. A Liturgical Wake will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 16 at Mother of God Monastery. Funeral Services will be held Thursday, July 17 at 10:30 a.m. in the monastery chapel with Fathers Denis Meier and Gary Ternes officiating. Burial will be in the monastery cemetery.

Bernice Gauer was born to the late Michael and Frances (Ertz) Gauer, at the family farm near Ipswich, SD. Her desire to become a Sister deepened over the years as she experienced her mother's strong faith, and in June 1950 at the age of 16 she entered Sacred Heart Convent in Yankton, SD. She was given the name Leona. She attended Mount Marty High School and made monastic profession in 1952.

S. Leona's first ministry in 1953 was in Epiphany, SD. She was a cook and prefect for the boarding school there. She continued as a cook and dietitian for the next fifteen years for hospitals in Yankton, Tyndall and Pierre and for schools in Stephan, SD, Richardton, ND and Harmony Hill in Watertown. She received a certificate in food service supervision from Fontbonne College in St. Louis.

In 1974 S. Leona began a new chapter in her life. She began working with a team that gave retreats, workshops and parish missions. With the added confidence she gained, she was led to a ministry with the divorced and widowed. She began working with people who were truly hurting. Sister Leona was given the special gift of helping people work through their pain. In 1978 she began to work for the Office of Marriage and Family for the Sioux Falls Diocese. She was then asked to become the Director of Divorced Ministry in 1981. She established a Watertown office and trained leaders, gave presentations and offered counseling when needed.

In 1984 S. Leona attended a one year program in Pastoral Ministry at St. Catherine's College in St. Paul, MN. She worked for two years in the Pastoral Care Department at St. Ann's Hospital in Watertown. She then returned to the monastery and helped with retreats and spiritual counseling with divorced individuals. In 1992 she moved to Sioux Falls and served 2.5 years as a co-director for a homeless shelter.

S. Leona became the director for the Benedictine Sisters Foundation in 2002. In addition, she began traveling to Sioux Falls to assist Fr. Gary Ternes with his prison ministry. After seven years she felt compelled to attend to her prison ministry with her whole heart so she resigned from the Foundation and moved to Sioux Falls. S. Leona spent endless hours walking the tiers of the South Dakota State Penitentiary, ministering as a chaplain to the inmates there. She also helped organize REC (Residents Encounter Christ) weekends held three times per year in Sioux Falls, Springfield and Pierre. Sister Leona tirelessly served in her prison ministry up to the day that God called her Home.

Sister Leona is survived by two brothers, Robert and Vernon, many nieces and nephews and her Sisters of Mother of God Monastery. She was preceded in death by her parents, sister Margaret and brother LeRoy.