

Alleluia!

Sister M. Noel Dreska, OSF



Sister Noel Dreska was born on December 24, 1928 in Kankakee, Illinois to Bernard and Edna Lambert Dreska. Baptized Margaret Ann at St. Rose of Lima Church, Kankakee, she was the younger of two daughters. She is survived by her sister Edna and family.

Margaret graduated from St. Joseph Seminary Elementary and High School in Kankakee. In 1946 she came to Joliet and spent three years as a student at the College of St. Francis. On September 5, 1949, Margaret entered the postulancy and completed her senior year at CSF. On August 12, 1950, she was received into the novitiate and given the name Sister Mary Noel. She professed first vows on August 12, 1952.

Sister Noel began teaching in 1951, as a second year novice, at St. Francis Academy, Joliet. She spent ten years there teaching mathematics at all levels and serving as moderator of various clubs.

In 1961, Noel moved to Columbus, Ohio to attend Ohio State University, where in 1965 she earned her doctorate degree in physics. In *A Patchwork Quilt*, Noel explained how she came to study physics,

“The beginning of my involvement with physics occurred in 1957 when Mother Borromeo asked me if I wanted to start graduate work. She asked me what I was interested in studying. I answered, ‘mathematics.’ She said, ‘I want you to study physics!’ So, of course, I answered, ‘Yes, Reverend Mother!’ and bowed my head.”

Noel was an outstanding student, the first Catholic Sister to earn a PhD in physics from OSU. Her advisor, Dr. K. Narahari Rao, wrote to Mother Borromeo in 1965 that Noel had “left an excellent impression on all her associates in the Physics Department.”

When she returned to Joliet, she began teaching at the College of St. Francis. These were the days when CSF and Lewis University were exploring the possibility of merging.

In 1972, when the merger did not take place, Noel became a member of the Lewis University faculty. For 30 years she was professor of physics and chairperson of the department, one of the first women in the country to chair a science department at the university level.

Throughout her career, Noel was known as a dedicated teacher, respected and loved by her students and colleagues alike. She was a visiting researcher at the University of Bologna and visiting professor at Bethlehem University. In 1987 she presented a paper entitled, “Francis, Physicists and Star Wars” at a Peace and Justice Conference sponsored by the Association of Catholic Colleges & Universities. Noel and her friend and colleague, Dr. Leonard Weisenthal, co-authored the book entitled *Physics for Aviation*, which was published in 1992.

Sister Noel regarded theology and physics to be closely related. She believed that science and religion are not opposed, but rather collaborate in telling the story of the universe. This prompted her to develop a course on “Physics and Faith.” In 1998 the Templeton Foundation awarded her a \$10,000 grant to develop this course, part of which she used to bring prominent guest lecturers from around the world to speak at Lewis.

Lewis University was a significant part of Noel’s life and Noel played a significant role in the lives of the students, faculty, administration and staff of Lewis. For this she received many honors. In 1999 she received the Distinguished Lasallian Education Award and this past January, Noel was recognized as an Affiliated Member of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Retirement from teaching was forced upon Noel when on December 22, 2001, she was injured in an automobile accident. Though she fought courageously, the injuries were too severe for her to recover. Surrounded by her good friend, Barb, Sisters with whom she had lived and some of her friends, Noel peacefully went home to her God on Sunday morning, November 2, 2003.

Sister Noel, we thank you for sharing your life with us as teacher, scientist, woman of faith, sister and friend these 53 years. As you begin eternity with the God you loved and served so faithfully, remember us, your family, your friends, your Franciscan Sisters. Amen! Alleluia!

