

*For those who have been faithful, O Lord,
He is not ended, but merely changed.*

October 18, 1987

Dear Sisters and Associates,

When Sister Thea Zahornek talked about her childhood, she says she was a "real tomboy" because she liked to play football, basketball and marbles, and she liked to climb trees! The fourth and middle child of Frank and Cornelia was born in Johnstown, PA on March 27, 1912. When she was baptized four days later, her name given was Maria Anna, but she was always called Mary until she received the name, Thea, at her religious reception in 1932.

Before joining the Joliet Franciscans, Mary had her first taste of teaching when one of the Sisters became ill at St. Stephen School in Johnstown. She had the distinction of being that school's first lay teacher.

In her teaching, in her conversation and in her writing, Sister Thea had a feistiness that reflected a zest for life. When students recall her teaching, echoes of her strong voice and her commanding look will pervade that memory. Others will picture her as she enthusiastically directed the annual Christmas cantata. Her many interests included art, music, sewing, cooking and flower arranging. Because of her appreciation for nature she would take the long way home from a trip just to pass a deer-crossing area or a place where she could see ducks! Mountains, especially the Alleghenies, gave her great delight!

Those of us who knew Sister Thea in recent years think of her as a mainstay at St. Stephen's in Streator. Others remember her many years of service at Saint Joseph's in Joliet or one of the schools where she ministered in Ohio. In March of 1986, the Times-Press of Streator named her an "Area Achiever" in the clergy category. In a colorful article describing her life she was recognized for her many years of dedicated service in Streator including the years from 1960 to 1966 and from 1969 on. She was principal and teacher at St. Stephen's school in addition to teaching CCD classes, directing the children's choir, decorating the altars and organizing and participating in many church functions.

Within the past two years we have witnessed her recovery from two near-death illnesses. She knew the Lord wanted her to do something more. Msgr. George Dzurzyo says she was a "tough competitor!" Sister Thea's one unfinished goal was to learn to play the organ or piano. She said she couldn't die until she accomplished that! Perhaps she didn't play an organ or piano, but she came back for several good encores!



Sister Thea was a most gracious person who liked to express in writing her appreciation of others. A note she had written earlier this month contains the words she probably would want to say to each of us now: "May the Blessed Mother stand beside you and bless you all your days for all you've done for me! God loves you and so do I."

We gather together at the celebration of the Eucharist and we thank God for Sister Thea's life among our Joliet Franciscan family and among the people she has served and loved.

We express our deepest sympathy to Josephine, Sister Thea's only surviving sister; to her nieces and nephew: Francine, Joanne, Joel Ann and Richard, and to all her relatives. We also extend sympathy to the children and adults of St. Stephen's Parish, to the other Sisters at St. Stephen's and to all her friends and former students. Together with all those who loved Sister Thea in life we celebrate her Life Eternal as we say Alleluia! Alleluia!



SISTER M. THEA ZAHORNEK, O.S.F. (MARY)

Born: March 26, 1912
 Parents: Frank and Cornelia (Barancok) Zahoranec
 Postulancy: September 8, 1931
 Novitiate: August 12, 1932
 First Profession: August 12, 1934
 Final Profession: August 12, 1937
 Died: October 14, 1987 at 11:32 p.m. in Streator, IL

Ministry:

1934 - 1955 St. Joseph, Joliet, IL, Grades 5,6,7, 8 and Superior and Principal
 1955 - 1956 Most Pure Heart of Mary, Shelby, OH, Grade 8, Superior and Principal
 1956 - 1960 St. Francis de Sales, Toledo, OH, Grade 8, Superior and Principal
 1960 - 1966 St. Stephen, Streator, IL, Grade 8, Superior and Principal
 1966 - 1968 St. Michael, Worthington, OH, Grade 8
 1968 - 1969 St. Mary Magdalene, Columbus, OH, Grade 8
 1969 - 1987 St. Stephen, Streator, IL, Grade 8, Principal, Part-time teacher

Wake: Saturday, October 17 at St. Stephen Parish, Streator, IL.
 Sunday, October 18, 1987 from 2 - 7 p.m. with prayer service at 4:15 p.m. at Our Lady of Angels

Mass of Christian Burial: Sunday, October 18, 1987 at 7 p.m.

Burial: Monday, October 19, 1987 from Our Lady of Angels at 9 a.m. to Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, IL

Survived by sister, Josephine Zahornek