

**SISTER M. CLAUDIA ZELLER O.S.F. (Catherine) 682**

**Born:** December 1, 1910 in Mansfield, OH  
**Parents:** Herman and Catherine (Brissel) Zeller  
**Postulancy:** September 6, 1926  
**Novitiate:** August 12, 1927  
**First Profession:** August 12, 1929  
**Final Profession:** August 12, 1932  
**Died:** Monday, February 25, 1991 at 6:00 p.m.  
at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet



**Ministry:**

1929 - 1931 St. John the Baptist, Grade 3  
1931 - Immaculate Conception, Columbus, OH, Grade 7  
1931 - 1934 St. Francis Xavier, Chicago, IL, Grades 4, 5 & 6  
1934 - 1939 St. Francis Academy, Joliet, IL, Mathematics & Physics  
1939 - 1944 University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, Graduate Study  
January 1944 College of St. Francis, Joliet, IL, Department of  
Mathematics and Physics  
1944 - 1969 College of St. Francis, IL, Department of Mathematics &  
Physics, Dean  
1969 - 1971 Washington, D.C., Executive Secretary of Conference of Major  
Superiors of Women  
1971 - 1972 National Catholic Education Association, Washington, D.C.  
Consultant for the Department of Colleges and Universities  
1972 - 1977 College of St. Francis, Joliet, IL, Associate Director of  
3 year Degree Program, Mathematics Department  
1977 - 1985 Cardinal Gibbons High School, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, Mathematics  
1985 - 1986 College of St. Francis, Joliet, IL, Mathematics  
1986 - 1990 Cardinal Gibbons High School, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, Mathematics  
January 1991 Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet, IL

**Wake:** Thursday, February 28, 1991 from 2:00 - 7:00 p.m.  
Prayer Service at 4:30 p.m. at Our Lady of Angels, Joliet

**Mass of Christian Burial:** Thursday, February 28, 1991 at 7 p.m.

**Burial:** Friday, March 1, 1991 at 9:00 a.m.  
Interment at Resurrection Cemetery

Survived by her sister, Sister M. Francine Zeller, O.S.F.

Sister Claudia, we thank you for your sixty-two years as our Sister. We will miss you. Sister Francine shared this verse which captures many of our feelings:

God saw she was getting tired  
A cure was not to be  
So He put His arms around her  
And whispered "Come with Me."  
With tearful eyes we watched her suffer  
And saw her fade away  
Although we loved her dearly,  
We could not make her stay.  
A golden heart stopped beating,  
Hard working hands to rest,  
God broke our hearts to prove to us  
He only takes the best.

Sister Claudia, the Lord has been your Shepherd, and now and for all eternity truly we believe "in nothing do you want." Amen! Alleluia!

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

On Monday evening, February 25, 1991, at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, our Sister Claudia Zeller was born to life eternal. Her death came quietly and gently. Her prayer "Come Lord Jesus", was answered!

Our Sister Claudia had been ill since last summer. She was determined that her students at Cardinal Gibbons High School would complete their math course with her, but by Christmas vacation she realized she could not return to the classroom.

On January 3, 1991 she "came home" to Our Lady of Angels to share her retirement days with her community and her little sister, our Sister Francine. A diagnosis of liver cancer marked the beginning of her final journey. She was a valiant woman who faced pain and death with the same courage and faith that characterized her life. "I am ready" she said over and over again, often stretching her arms toward her favorite painting of Jesus crucified.

The Zeller sisters remained close together during these final weeks. They who had experienced so many death and resurrection moments together in their lives, cherished this time together, always trying to shield each other from pain. We can only say to our Sister Francine, "we pray that your own abiding faith will sustain you as you let her go to All she has believed in and reached toward all her life."

Sister Claudia was given the name Catherine when she was born December 1, 1910 in Mansfield, Ohio to Catherine and Herman Zeller. There were three girls in the family, Mary, Catherine and Genevieve (Francine). Only Sister Francine survives. In 1978 Sister Claudia wrote about her family:

"My parents were good and sincere Catholics. They revered God and the Church, were faithful to prayer, and were respected and loved by many. Through them I received life, love, simplicity and a joyful spirit. My two sisters, close to me in age and affection, were my constant childhood companions. Time has deepened and strengthened our mutual love and reverence for each other."

When Catherine was thirteen, she left St. Peter's School in Mansfield. There was no high school, and our Sisters suggested that she attend the aspirancy school at St. Francis Academy in Joliet. This was a very natural decision for Catherine. She said, "I loved school, and at the age of five I wanted to be a Sister so that I would teach school. I never lost that desire." She entered the postulancy in 1926 and made final vows at the age of twenty-one. "I could promise for all the days of my life because I knew God's love and grace had compensated for my youth and inexperience. Truly I felt chosen." In 1989 she celebrated her Diamond Jubilee of sixty years.



Sister Claudia once said, "As far back as I can remember, I stood in awe of learning." She was a mathematician who often said that the universe proves that God is a mathematician. Mathematics became religious poetry with her guidance. One of her students said, "I remember Claudia, her great smile, her warmth, her humor, her humility...a giant intellect without arrogance. She has left her mark on so many, giving all of us a love for learning and for the beauty of truth."

The words of Daniel 12:3 find true meaning in the life of Sister Claudia. "Those who instruct others unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity." Sister Claudia was a teacher of mathematics and life. She was mentor to a generation of mathematics teachers. They remember with reverence a Math Zero course to help those who struggled to understand mathematics. On the Friday before she died, she spent the day in bed "teaching." Finally she turned to Sister Francine and said, "Francine, I know my fractions, I only wish they knew their arithmetic."

She was a teacher for fifty-eight years. Thirty-one of those years were spent at the College of St. Francis, and the College experienced the dynamic impact of her leadership. She served as Academic Dean of CSF for sixteen years, establishing the Graduate Program in the Seraphic Institute. She helped direct the feasibility study of a possible merger between Lewis University and the College of St. Francis. From 1969-72 she left the College and held important national positions with the Conference of Major Superiors of Women and the National Catholic Education Association. She later returned to CSF as Associate Director of the three year Degree Program, producing a document on the Catholic Character of the College of St. Francis. She truly deserved the honor of Professor Emeritus she received from the College of St. Francis.

In 1977, at age sixty-seven she began a new venture. She accepted an invitation to join our Sisters at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Florida to teach mathematics. She entered this new venture with her characteristic vigor and enthusiasm. She said it was "challenging and fun" and added, "it's the best way I know how to tell God's people that I love them."

Our Congregation has experienced the dynamic leadership of Sister Claudia. From 1956, through all our Congregation Chapters and important committee work, she helped create the goals and mission directions for our Congregation. She was a "wisdom woman", in touch with the reality of our world and of our Church, understanding the vision of Vatican II. One Sister spoke of her, "She studied, planned, discerned and suffered with us to allow the message of Vatican II to flourish. When she spoke, we listened. She was a fearless woman, a woman of integrity. We knew her only intent was to keep alive our charism as followers of the gentle Francis."

Her spirituality was wholehearted. In her new room at OLA she quickly established a prayer corner. In simplicity her constant prayer was "The Lord is my Shepherd."

An academic colleague wrote to her, "I feel a special debt of gratitude to you because you embody for me the true spirit of St. Francis. I never really knew it before, and I've come to recognize it in Franciscans I've met, but never as clearly and singly as in you." What a wonderful tribute to our Sister.