

Death Notice

SISTER MARY JOANNE

ND 5497

Joanne Louise WITTENBURG



Immaculate Conception Province, USA

Date of Birth	November 27, 1940	Los Angeles, California
First Profession	August 16, 1961	Los Angeles, California
Date of Death	October 4, 2026	Thousand Oaks, California

Sister Mary Joanne was the first daughter of Harry William and Florence Wittenburg. Within a few years, her brother, Jim, her sister, Elayne, and another brother, Bob, joined the family. Born and raised in Los Angeles, from an early age Sister Mary Joanne was interested in its culture and history, and always eager to share her knowledge with others. Her father's managerial position took him to many sites, and he frequently combined business with pleasure by taking the entire family with him. Sister related that these trips awakened in her a love for southern California, travel, and history.

Joanne was nine months old when the family settled in Cheviot Hills, a neighborhood across the street from the Sisters of Notre Dame on Overland Avenue. From kindergarten through high school, Sister attended elementary and then high school with the Sisters of Notre Dame. She knew and loved many of California's pioneer sisters.

Graduating with a Masters' degree in history and social studies from Loyola University, Sister taught in high school for several years. In 1987, her talent for history and research led her to the Education Foundation of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. During that period, she responded to the opportunity to spend one year at Lviv Theological Seminary in Ukraine, helping students with English. Upon her return, she was invited to serve as the Cathedral archivist for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles from 2002-2013. Even after moving to Notre Dame Center, Sister Mary Joanne continued to assist in this work. During the last days of her illness, Cardinal Roger Mahoney sent a special letter assuring the community of his prayers and thanking Sister for her contribution to the archdiocese.

Known for her published historical writing, Sister Joanne leaves a legacy of California memories. After writing *House of Love*, she wrote and published *Spreading the Fire: the Story of the Sisters of Notre Dame in California 1924-2010*. She co-authored *The History of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles*, contributing especially to the chapter on the history of the parish elementary schools.

Most recently, and even as her health declined, Sister Mary Joanne spent hours scanning the letters and historical publications of the congregation for digital preservation.

She meticulously kept the house Annals for Notre Dame Center, oversaw the spiritual reading library, and made time to crochet beautiful blankets, and visit the children in our preschool.

Sister died peacefully at Notre Dame Center fulfilling what she wrote in her entrance autobiography: "I hope that as a Sister of Notre Dame my life may be one of complete surrender to God's will and of service to his children." And that is exactly what she did.