



Name: Sister Carol Stiefvater (Sister Mary Matthew)
Date of Birth: October 1, 1928
Place of Birth: Manitowoc, Wisconsin
Parents: Robert Xavier and Alice Marie (Gries) Stiefvater
Religious Profession: June 14, 1949
Date of Death: November 25, 2021
Age: 93
Years Professed: 72

Wake Reflection by Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director

Carol Marie Stiefvater was the fifth child born to Robert Xavier and Alice Marie (Gries) Stiefvater on October 1, 1928 in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Carol was Baptized at Sacred Heart Church in Manitowoc on October 7, 1928. She made her First Holy Communion there on March 26, 1935 and was Confirmed on November 5, 1942.

Carol grew up with two older brothers, Eugene and Robert, and two older sisters, Vivian and Alice. They attended Sacred Heart School, which was staffed by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. When she was five years old she told her family that she was going to be a Sister. When her Mother's friends asked her what she wanted to be, she replied, "A Comedian!" At the time of her Eighth Grade Graduation, Sister Adele was encouraging the girls to enter the Convent. Carol felt relieved when her parents told Sister, "Not until after High School."

Carol attended Wilson Junior High and in 1946 she received her Diploma from Lincoln Senior High School. After high school she went to Mount Mary College in Milwaukee to begin a degree to pursue a career in Physical Therapy. During her Freshman year Catherine DuHueck Dougherty, founder of Friendship Centers for Society's Outcasts, was a guest presenter. Carol, along with some of the other students were so impressed with Catherine's simplicity and fervor that they skipped classes to spend the rest of the day with her.

Having been raised in a religious, spiritually focused family, Carol frequently made visits to Chapel and attended the various religious services made available to the students. One evening during Benediction, Carol was taken by surprise, when she felt God inviting her to become a Sister. Carol continued to pray about this and was surprised again when she went home for a visit and her Mother said, "If you want to enter the Convent this summer, you have your Father's and my blessing." Carol was undecided about entering the Convent and talked with her Pastor. Her Pastor said, "You won't know until you try!"

Carol did apply and her pastor wrote the following letter of recommendation dated July 24, 1947:

To Whom It May Concern,

Miss Carol Stiefvater informs me that she is desirous of entering the Religious Life. She has conferenced with me on several occasions regarding her vocation. She graduated from our school in 1942. I can say that she was a very religious girl while in our school and even thereafter. She shows very good signs of a vocation. Also, she has the qualifications and character for a good religious teacher.

Rev. L. M. Schorn

Pastor, Sacred Heart Parish

Carol entered Holy Family Convent on August 20, 1947 as an Aspirant. The following letter was written to Mother Edna, dated December 6, 1947:

I wish to thank you for admitting me as an Aspirant to our Convent, thus enabling me to enter upon a new life, a life whereby I may be closer to God and be the instrument of His Will. Now, though totally unworthy, I desire to enter the Postulancy of the Order of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. I humbly ask that you confer this favor upon me. With God's grace, my Superiors' guidance and my own whole-hearted effort, I shall endeavor to be a holy and deserving Postulant, if you will grant me this petition. If, however, I do not meet with the qualifications of the Order, I promise to leave peacefully. May God's blessings be forever upon you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Carol Stiefvater

Carol did receive the Postulant crucifix on December 8th and on June 13, 1948 she was admitted into the Novitiate, receiving the name Sister Mary Matthew. She continued her formal studies at Holy Family College and then taught fifth grade for eight years at St. Willibrord School in Chicago. At the time of Vatican Council II, Sister Mary Matthew returned to her baptismal name and became Sister Carol.

In the spring of 1952, Cardinal Stritch sent requests to all the Religious Communities working in the Archdiocese of Chicago, for Sisters to teach the deaf children in Chicago. Our Community was among those who responded. Mother Edna asked Sister Syra Whitman, who was teaching first grade at St. Willibrord, if she would enter this new apostolate. Sister Syra accepted the challenge and began her training at Loyola University. She took night classes in deaf education while continuing her teaching. After one year she went to St. Francis de Paula School where she did her student teaching, became Head Teacher and then instructor in Hearing Handicapped education for teachers.

In 1957 Sister Carol was also asked to begin Loyola University's summer classes in preparation for teaching Hearing Impaired children. In 1958 Sister Carol joined Sister Syra and two other teachers at St. Francis DePaul parochial school where Catholic Charities had rented and equipped four classrooms for Hearing Impaired children on Chicago's South Side. All of their pupils were mainstreamed with the regular hearing students for some parts of the school day.

Sister Carol earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois in 1962. She received a Master of Science in Administrative Services from Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, Illinois in 1974 with a Major in Counseling and a Minor in Education.

In 1981 Sister Carol and Sister Syra moved to Williamsburg, Kentucky to become parish outreach ministers at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish. After two years of working with the parish, the County Department of Children and Families asked Sister Carol and Sister Syra to become Foster Parents. Their residence became known as Peace Place for children. From Christmas, 1982 until Sister Syra's death in May 1998, over 200 youth of all ages and stages of disabilities were placed at Peace Place for periods varying from one day to six years. In May 1999 Rich Yaeger's family moved on to the property with the intention of Sister Carol mentoring Rich to become the Director and take over the operations of Peace Place. During this time of transition a Respite Care program for persons with disabilities and special needs was established.

Seeing that Peace Place was in good hands, Sister Carol moved back to Wisconsin in 2003 to live at St. Francis Convent. She enjoyed the companionship of the Sisters, walks and a rich prayer life with many spiritual opportunities and telling the stories of the Chicago and Kentucky ministries.

When her health began to decline in 2011, Sister Carol moved to St. Rita Health Center. She was grateful for all the care she received and always had a thank you, a big smile and a cheerful greeting for each person she met. Sister Carol loved music and always brightened up with "You Are My Sunshine!" She also was very fond of Polkas! When she was able, she looked forward to visiting with family and friends. During those visits Sister Carol would offer words of encouragement and advice. One Sister was told, "Don't wait until you are good at something before you do it. Just do it and you will get better at it." Having witnessed many disabled and handicapped people all of her life, Sister Carol embraced her own physical decline with acceptance and joy, knowing that she was joining her suffering to Jesus' suffering.

Reflecting on Sister Carol's life, a defining moment that seemed to give direction to her passion for life and her love for God and the less fortunate, was the encounter with Catherine DuHueck Dougherty. Thank you, Sister Carol, for the witness of your life by answering God's call to be a Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity. May God grant you eternal life. May you rest in peace. Amen!