

Death Notice

SISTER MARY FRANCOIS

ND 4045

Antoinette ZAPPONE



Christ the King Province, Chardon, Ohio, USA

Date and Place of Birth:	May 2, 1923	Cleveland, Ohio
Date and Place of Profession:	August 16, 1946	Cleveland, Ohio
Date and Place of Death:	December 4, 2014	Health Care Center, Chardon
Date and Place of Funeral:	December 10, 2014	Chardon, Ohio
Date and Place of Burial:	December 10, 2014	Resurrection Cemetery, Chardon, Ohio

“Let the little children come to me.”

Antoinette was the second of four daughters born to Eugenio and Assunta (Bucciarelli) Zappone, Italian immigrants who arrived in New York, New York in 1919. Records show the family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1923. These were happy years where her parents nurtured love and concern for one another despite cultural barriers, the Great Depression and World War II. The family became members of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish where Antoinette and her sisters first met the Sisters of Notre Dame. After graduating from South High School and completing two years of work experience, Antoinette entered the Sisters of Notre Dame. At investment she felt privileged to receive the name Sister Mary Francois, honoring St. Julie’s best friend.

Sister Mary Francois received a bachelor’s degree from St. John College, Cleveland, and ministered as a classroom teacher to primary grade children in parish schools for ten years before being assigned to Julie Billiard School, begun by the Sisters of Notre Dame in 1954 as an alternative elementary school for children with special learning needs. Although apprehensive at first, Sister later commented, “This was the kind of work God meant me to have. I am convinced this was my journey.”

For fifty-three consecutive years Sister Mary Francois worked tirelessly to strengthen the educational experience of children with special learning needs. She took a personal interest in each of her students, helping to provide them with a foundation for happy, productive lives, and endeared herself to parents, teachers and students. The essence of her love and dedication was her unconditional acceptance of all children.

Sister was a woman of conviction, gentleness, serenity and wisdom, all wrapped in a loving smile. She was grateful for the close relationship she had with St. Julie and her work with children – and was often called the “walking St. Julie.” Sister Mary Francois was enriched by the many families and dedicated teachers she touched over the years. “...they have also helped me see how beautiful God’s family really is. They are very dear to me, and I love them all. They are my heart.”

In 2008, after many tears and grateful hugs from students, parents and teachers, Sister Mary Francois retired from her ministry at Julie Billiard School. She transitioned into more quiet days of prayer and assisting with hospitality at the Provincial Center. Even as Sister’s physical condition changed, her warm, welcoming smile and the twinkle in her eye seemed to be ever-present! May Sister Mary Francois now be embraced by the limitless love of our good and gracious God.