

Sister Elise Mary, S.S.N.D., served 58 years in Baltimore schools

School Sister of Notre Dame Elise Mary Saydah, who for 58 years served in the Archdiocese of Baltimore as an educator and administrator at St. Mary's High School in Annapolis, the Institute of Notre Dame in Baltimore and Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson, died Oct. 15.

Raised in North Bergen, N.J., by a father from Lebanon and a mother from France, her first encounter with the School Sisters was at her high school, the Academy of the Holy Angels in Fort Lee, N.J.

In an obituary prepared by her order, Sister Elise Mary was quoted as remembering, "Their warm manner and sincere interest in the students deeply impressed me."

She studied at what is now Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore, where she learned more about the School Sisters and earned a bachelor's degree in French. After a few years of working to support herself and her mother, including at her prep alma mater, Sister Elise Mary entered the order.

While a candidate, she taught history and French at the Institute of Notre Dame. She professed her first vows in 1957. She began her vocation teaching French and religion at the Institute of Notre Dame (1957-63), and served as the guidance counselor at Notre Dame Preparatory School (1963-64).

Sister Elise Mary taught French, and acted as vice principal and principal at the Institute of Notre Dame (1971-84 and 1987-88). At St. Mary's High School, she taught French and religion, and was assistant principal and administrative assistant over three stretches there (1964-71, 1984-87 and 1988-2013).

"Her beauty lay in her love of people and in her deep humanity," Chris Morgan, assistant vice principal for academics at St. Mary's High School and close friend of Sister Mary Elise for 30 years, told the Review. "I feel as close to her now as ever, which I attribute to the lovely power of her spirit."

In 2013, Sister Elise Mary retired to prayer ministry at Villa Assumpta in Baltimore.

According to an obituary prepared by her order, Sister Elise Mary is remembered as a “cutting edge teacher and natural leader.” She will be remembered for her wisdom, peace, great sense of humor, gentleness and caring.

A funeral Mass was offered Oct. 20 at Villa Assumpta. The Mass was concelebrated by Capuchin Franciscan Father Roman Kovacheson, chaplain of Villa Assumpta, and Redemptorist Father Andrew Costello, vicar of St. Mary in Annapolis and a longtime friend of Sister Elise Mary.