

# MERGEN

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"Watching over it all was Sister Martin in her German hat," he said. "For years, she rallied the campus and its alums for the event, and for years its success helped fuel financial aid opportunities for MMC students."

The Benedictine nun died Monday morning at age 72, ending a lifetime of dedication to Mount Marty High School, Mount Marty College and the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls.

The wake is at 7:30 p.m. today (Wednesday) and the funeral is at 10:30 a.m. Thursday, both at Bishop Marty Chapel next to Sacred Heart Monastery. She will be buried in the monastery's cemetery.

The diocesan chancery in Sioux Falls confirmed Tuesday afternoon that Bishop Paul Swain plans to attend Thursday's funeral.

For those who knew her, Sister Martin's passing has brought sadness but also joy in recalling her life.

"Sister Martin's enormous smile and her rural charm were only outdone by her love for Mount Marty," said Koupal, now at Minnesota State-Mankato. "From (her selection as MMC's first) Homecoming Queen to board member (as a trustee), she was the college's best good-will ambassador."

The Benedictine Sisters have also lost a member of their community. Sisters Francine Streff, Marie Helene Werdel, Evangelina Anderson, Patricia Ann Toscano and Cynthia Binder spoke Tuesday of their fellow nun's tremendous dedication to the college and monastery.

"When you went to alumni functions, she never just said, 'Hello, how are you?' She always

had the time to talk to people," Sister Cynthia said. "This morning at Mass, the last chapter of the rule of St. Benedict was 'good zeal.' I always felt that way about Sister Martin. She was happy when good things happened to people."

The nuns recalled how Sister Martin served as a teacher, administrator and even a dorm mother at Mount Marty. She later moved to Sioux Falls to work for Catholic Family Services. While living in Sioux Falls, she also conducted a prison ministry at the state penitentiary and helped train altar servers and read Scripture at Masses at St. Joseph's Cathedral.

Sister Martin loved to entertain, often hosting MMC alumni or a group of nuns in Sioux Falls. Her brother would barbecue for the guests.

The nuns also recalled her love for bright colors, reflecting her personality.

"Martin loved color in her clothes," Sister Francine said. "Her scarves had a dash of bright color. She even had multi-colored shoes that she wore when she read at Mass."

Sister Martin's personality drew others to her, and she remained popular with alumni who often asked for her at gatherings, said Sister Marie Helene.

Sister Patricia Ann marveled at Sister Martin's ability to say she needed a 10-minute nap, fall asleep quickly and then wake exactly 10 minutes later without an alarm or being called.

"Martin would say, 'I have my energy now. I have to do this and this and this,'" Sister Patricia Ann said.

Sister Martin provided an example of care, enthusiasm and listening, said Sister Francine, who served as student body vice president while Sister Martin was dean of students.

"Martin was always saying, 'OK, what can we do to make

Mount Marty the best?'" Sister Francine added.

Carrol Krause, serving his second term as MMC interim president, said he found Sister Martin a valuable resource during both his times on campus.

"She had such a good knowledge of the campus and community, and all of southeast South Dakota," Krause said. "She felt Catholic education was critical to maintain."

Sister Martin reached out to others, Krause said. "She was a humble servant who wanted to get things done. I saw her as a person willing to help anybody in need," he said.

She showed a sincere gladness to meet people, Krause said.

"It wasn't hard for her to get acquainted," he said. "You weren't a stranger with her for very long."

Sister Martin's impact has provided a lifetime influence for MMC graduates Fred Ertz and Tom Harmon, who served as student body presidents while she was dean of students. The two men were currently serving with Sister Martin on the MMC Board of Trustees.

The two alums described her as tough but fair with students, always willing to listen to other viewpoints. Even when Sister Martin didn't agree with the student position, she showed respect for the person and the proposal.

Sister Martin would offer suggestions on getting more information or following a path that would benefit the students, the two men said.

Sister Martin helped Ertz maintain a heavy academic workload and get his foot in the door as anchor and news director at KELO-TV in Sioux Falls. He now works in media in the Fort Worth, Texas, area.

"Because she was the dean at the time, students referred to

her as 'Dean Martin,'" Ertz said, jokingly referring to the late singer and entertainer. "She had her rules, and rules are meant to be kept. But I got along real well with Sister Martin."

Sister Martin and the other Benedictine Sisters provided life lessons not found in the classroom, Ertz said. "I thought in terms of not only not letting myself down but not letting Sister Martin down, either," he said.

Sister Martin carried a strong passion for MMC and her other ministries that will continue living on, Ertz said.

"At Mount Marty, you aren't part of a college — you're part of a family," he said. "I will be at her funeral. It will be sad, but it's a celebration of her life. She touched so many people."

Harmon said he likewise plans to attend Thursday's funeral. Now an Omaha attorney, Harmon said he learned many reasoning skills from Sister Martin that have molded his career.

The college has become a family tradition, as Harmon's son, Dan, graduated from MMC last spring. Tom Harmon attended both the commencement and what turned out to be his last trustee meeting with Sister Martin.

Harmon recalled one of those final conversations with Sister Martin, when she expressed concern about her mother's medical condition which could necessitate selling the family home. Sister Martin hoped her mother, in her 90s, could adapt to a new setting.

"It was unique to have that conversation," Harmon said. "I first met Sister Martin as my dean, and now we were talking as friends."

In the same manner, the Benedictine Sisters feel as if they have lost a friend.

The nuns were shocked at

Sister Martin's quick death, three weeks after a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. Most of the Sisters were unable to say goodbye to her before her passing at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls.

"That's one of the things that makes this more difficult for us," said Sister Patricia Ann.

"We believed that she could conquer this (cancer)," Sister Marie Helene said. "The last time I saw Sister Martin, I said, 'Good-bye, behave yourself.' And she said, 'See you around the corner sometime.' She gave me that big smile."

As the new MMC college relations director at the time, Koupal fondly recalls a 1983 trip he took with Sister Martin to a Colorado Springs conference. While walking together during the winter evening, Sister Martin slipped on the ice. A shocked Koupal helped her to her feet, asking if she was all right.

"There was a moment of silence. Suddenly she burst out laughing. We laughed about that for the rest of the conference," he said. "We laughed many times over many other things as we enjoyed a close working relationship for the next 13 years. As my supervisor, she was more than my boss; she was a dear and supportive friend whose example planted a deep devotion to MMC and its Benedictine mission."

And now, she has gone forever, Koupal said. "I left MMC in 1996, yet it was my years at Mount Marty that made me want to return to higher education," he said. "It was Sister Martin who helped me get my current position with Minnesota State University, Mankato. (That's) another I.O.U. that I won't be able to repay."

"She was an amazing person. One of a kind. And I will miss her dearly."



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