



ATTN: EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
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OBITUARY for Former School Sister of St. Francis Francis Rothluebber

Francis Rothluebber, who served as the sixth Superior General of the School Sisters of St. Francis, died in Rockford, Illinois, on August 13, 2025, at the age of 103.

Alma Rothluebber was born February 14, 1922, in St. Libory, Nebraska. She was received into the School Sisters of St. Francis on June 13, 1938, as Sister M. Francis Borgia. She made her first profession of vows on August 12, 1940, and final (perpetual) vows on August 8, 1946.

She is survived by her sister Alvina Meirose of Sturgis, South Dakota; her brother Hubert Rothluebber of Norfolk, Nebraska; several nieces, nephews, and a cousin; many friends; and by the School Sisters of St. Francis, with whom she ministered for more than half a century.

She earned a bachelor's degree in English from Alverno College in 1943; a master's degree in English from DePaul University in 1949; and received two honorary doctorates in 1975: in humane letters from Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, and in law from Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee.

As Sister Francis Borgia, she began her ministry in 1942, teaching in Milwaukee at St. Catherine School. The following school year, she began two decades of service at Alvernia High School in Chicago, where she was teacher and principal. From 1963-1966, she was the supervising coordinator for high school religious education for the Archdiocese of Chicago, while also serving as staff assistant at Loyola University's Institute of Pastoral Studies.

In 1966, delegates of the congregation's general chapter elected Sister Francis Borgia as Superior General of the School Sisters of St. Francis. Press reports at the time of her election noted she would serve a six-year term leading a worldwide congregation of more than 3,600 professed sisters across the United States, Germany, and Central America.

Noting that the recently completed Second Vatican Council had called for a revision of constitutions, Mother Francis Borgia and her leadership team engaged the congregation in the development of the *Response in Faith* rule of life. This document was a dramatic change from past constitutions for its depth in expressing the meaning of religious life. Also in response to the Council's calls, she and her team adopted a secretariat model that spread out leadership responsibilities to more sisters, and changed the congregation's formation expectations.

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In May 1972, delegates unanimously re-elected Sister Francis Borgia to the presidency of the congregation. "I believe this election affirms the direction in renewal which the community has taken, and is a mandate to pick up the large questions before us," she told the *Milwaukee Catholic Herald Citizen*. "These are questions concerning the role of women in the Church, clarification of corporate thrust, organizational impact for social change, and above all the question of searching for deeper interiority within a life of social involvement."

As she began her second term in congregational leadership, Sister Francis Borgia was also elected to serve a three-year term as president-elect, president, and past president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Her leadership of LCWR "influenced the renewal of religious life in many congregations in the United States," a congregational publication noted at the time.

Following her terms in leadership, Sister Francis Borgia ministered as a lecturer, retreat director, and counselor, first in Milwaukee and later in Idyllwild, California. In December 1994, she received dispensation from her religious vows, but remained a lifelong friend of many of her sisters.

The author of numerous books on religious life and spirituality, Francis continued to write well into her 90s.

Francis was injured in a fall in September 2024 that required surgery and hospitalization. In late July 2025, she moved to Rockford where she received care at the home of a friend and the services of Northern Illinois Hospice Association.

A Mass in memory of Francis will be celebrated in St. Joseph Chapel in Milwaukee on Tuesday, September 16, at 4 p.m. For those outside Milwaukee or otherwise unable to attend, the Mass will be streamed live and archived on our congregation's Ustream channel:
<https://video.ibm.com/channel/school-sisters-of-st-francis>

Immediately following the liturgy, there will be an evening gathering of friends at Sacred Heart to celebrate Francis' life and legacy.

A service and interment will be held in Idyllwild, California, at Spirit Mountain Retreat Center on Wednesday, September 24.

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