

Biographical Sketch: Gwen Cecilia (Billings) Coniker was born in Chicago on September 27, 1939. She met her future husband, Jerry, when she was 14 years old, while they were both attending St. Gregory High School. They were married on the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1959 and consecrated their marriage to Jesus through Mary at Our Lady's side altar. Jerry was 20 years old and Gwen was 19. They had no idea then what Our Lady was calling them to.

Seeing the decline in Christian values in society, they soon became deeply involved in the right-to-life and family values movement. Gwen loved children and always said she would like to have a dozen. "There's nothing like a baby!" she would say. Her first one was Maureen Therese, born premature on June 22, 1960. Then followed Kathy Lynne, Laurie Ann, Margaret Rose, Sharon Marie, Michael John, and Robert Anthony.

The direction of their lives was drastically changed on April 28 (Feast of St. Louis de Montfort), 1971, when they made their consecration to Jesus through Mary according to the St. Louis de Montfort formula. This is the same consecration that changed the life of Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II, whose papal motto is *Totus Tuus, Mater Ecclesiae* ("Totally yours, Mother of the Church"). After making this consecration, Jerry and Gwen were convinced more than ever that the battle to end abortion and save the family was primarily a spiritual one, thus they decided to devote their lives full-time to serving God.

On May 13th (Feast of Our Lady of Fatima) that same year, the Conikers sold their home and later on, their business. On September 8th (Our Lady's birthday), they moved their family to Fatima, Portugal. Their third son, Joseph Vincent, was born in Portugal. After a two-year "retreat-preparation" time for their work in the Church, the Conikers responded to a request for help from Rev. Bernard Geiger, OFM. CONV. who was the local director of St. Maximilian Kolbe's Knights of the Immaculata. They returned to the United States in June of 1973. Jerry worked as a full-time Executive Director under Fr. Bernard to establish the national center of the Knights of Immaculata movement. Soon after, Gwen gave birth to her ninth child, James Francis—the first of four Caesarean births. Maria Ann was born a year later on September 4th.

On June 18, Feast of the Sacred Heart, in 1975 (which was a Holy Year), Jerry and Gwen founded the Apostolate for Family Consecration in Kenosha, Wisconsin. When she became pregnant with her eleventh child, Gwen adamantly refused to abort her baby, despite the doctor's warnings that she would not survive the birth. Theresa Marie, a healthy baby girl, was born just after Christmas in 1975. A year later, Gwen miscarried their twelfth child, Angelica. On October 23, 1977, Gwen gave birth to their thirteenth child, Mary Elizabeth.

Jerry and Gwen were married for forty-two (42) years, and their love for each other grew every day. They had the joy of watching their family grow, first with their 13 children, then 11 faithful spouses, and 52 grandchildren (and still counting!), who through the grace of God are all in the Faith.

Their love for God and each other blossomed as the Apostolate for Family Consecration grew into an international movement for families. It has four key interrelated family ministries—Familyland TV Network, Catholic Familyland centers in the USA, Mexico, the Philippines, Belgium, and Nigeria, Consecration in Truth Catechetics and Lay Ecclesial Teams—with members on five continents.

Gwen had a kindred spirit friendship with both Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa. From 1984 - 2002, Gwen was privileged to have had nine papal encounters. Pope John Paul II read her soul as he looked deeply into her eyes. On April 29, 1999, the Holy Father appointed Jerry and Gwen to be members of his Pontifical Council for the Family, which advises the papacy on family matters in the world. The Coniker family represented the theme—"Children, the Springtime of Hope for Family and Society" at the Jubilee Year 2000 celebration at St. Peter's Square with the Pope before hundreds of thousands of people. On October 7, 2001, Jerry and Gwen received the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Award from Pope John Paul II through

Bishop Gilbert Sheldon of Steubenville, and were later received into the Pontifical order of the Knights of St. Michael of the Wing by the crown prince of Portugal. Thus Gwen was named "Lady Guenevere."

On November 2, 2001, Gwen was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver and was told that she had less than a year to live. This was contracted by a blood transfusion during one or more of her Caesarean births in the mid 1970's. She peacefully accepted her sickness and physical sufferings. She had no regrets. She loved all her children and she loved life. On May 13, 2002, she left the Cleveland Clinic diagnosed with cirrhosis plus cancer, and spent her last days in pain and peaceful acceptance. She passed away at 5:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 15, 2002 in the arms of her loving husband after the Anointing of the Sick by Fr. Bernard Geiger (who has been the Conikers' spiritual director since 1973) at her home at Catholic Familyland in Bloomingdale, Ohio. She was sixty-two (62) years old. It is no coincidence that she died on June 15th, which was the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart in 1917—the same year that Our Lady appeared to the three Shepherd Children at Fatima, Portugal. This is a movable feast on which the Apostolate for Family Consecration celebrates its founding.

Gwen was laid to rest on June 22, 2002, on the 42nd birthday of her first child, Maureen. Her body lies in the crypt of The Apostolate's St. John Vianney Oratory Chapel at Catholic Familyland, Bloomingdale, Ohio, behind the altar of our Blessed Mother of the Assumption. The altar contains a relic of St. Louis de Montfort and a copy of the original handwritten manuscript of his famous work, "True Devotion to Mary"—a spirituality that formed her life and the life of Pope John Paul II. A "Tomb to the Unborn Child" commemorating the millions of aborted babies has been erected near Gwen's grave, giving testimony to a mother who gave her all and was willing to sacrifice her life for her children. She died the way she lived—never complaining and always caring.

Gwen said it all in the closing paragraph of her letter to her family on June 10, 2002: "My prayerful wish is that each one of my children will raise their family close to God and find God's will for their life. All my grandchildren, I love you. —Mom"



Kindred Spirits—
Gwen Coniker & Mother Teresa

"The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, and the fruit of service is peace."

—Mother Teresa

Those who receive favors through the intercession of Gwen or have any personal knowledge of her are asked to communicate with us:

Apostolate for Family Consecration* Catholic Familyland®
3375 County Road 36, Bloomingdale, OH 43910-7903, U.S.A.
(740) 765-5500 • 1-800-77-FAMILY • fax (740) 765-5561
www.familyland.org • usa@familyland.org

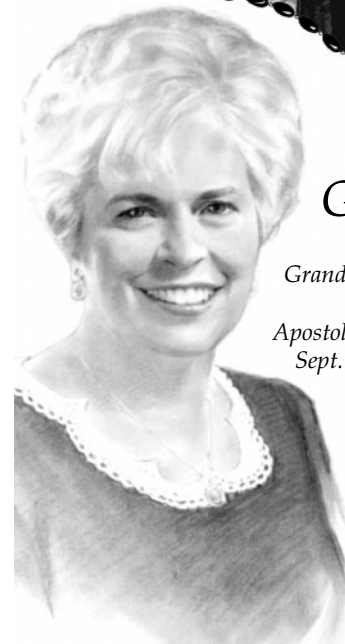
Philippines: St. Joseph Center, PO Box 0026, Las Piñas City
TEL: (632) 871-4440, 871-4439 Tele-Fax 875-3506
E-mail: asia@familyland.org

©MMIII Apostolate for Family Consecration®

May be reproduced without changes.

This card is #327-86K @ \$14/pkg of 100 + \$4 shipping.

2-hour tribute to Gwen and her apostolate
Videotape #164-486 @ \$6.00 + \$4.00 shipping



Gwen Coniker

Wife, Mother of 13,
Grandmother of 52 and counting
Co-founder of the
Apostolate for Family Consecration
Sept. 27, 1939 – June 15, 2002

- A consecrated child of the Holy Family
- A faithful wife
- A proud mother
- A caring grandmother
- A person for others who wanted to save all families and totally trusted in Divine Providence

Gwen's Way of Life

Holiness and happiness are fruits of joyfully fulfilling the responsibility of each present moment... All for the Sacred and Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, all through the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, all in union with St. Joseph.

"All for" as lived by Gwen

Each moment of the day carries a responsibility, which manifests God's will for us. When we are in the state of grace and fulfill the responsibility of each present moment to please God, sanctifying grace increases in us. We become more pleasing to Him, we repair for sin, and we advance true peace in families and in the world. We can develop the habit of consulting God more frequently throughout the day by praying "All for" before every decision and action. We can do this with the intention of asking for the grace to discern His will moment by moment, and the strength to do it in times of peace or conflict. It is then that we experience a sense of security, joy, and God's peace, knowing that we are doing what God asks of us, which is truly abandoning ourselves to God's providence.

(To better understand how to grow in grace, see paragraphs 460 and 1996-2029 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. For more on doing God's will see Mt. 21:23, Jn. 4:34, and Jn. 6:38. Also read *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Jean -Pierre de Caussade.)

Gwen Coniker was an outstanding model for wives, mothers, grandmothers and evangelists striving to live with great love the responsibility of the present moment, as asked for by Vatican II¹. Some of her greatest virtues were gratitude and her willingness to listen. She had a true mother's heart that was filled with disinterested selfless love.

¹ Cf. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church-[*Lumen Gentium*]", Section 34.

Gwen Cecilia Coniker

Sept. 27, 1939–June 15, 2002

Family-maker

Home-maker

Peace-maker



Faithful wife, mother of 13, grandmother of 52 (and counting), and evangelist through Familyland® TV Network, Catholic Familyland® centers, Consecration in Truth® Catechetics, and Lay Ecclesial Teams

Co-Founder of the Apostolate for Family Consecration®



Gwen holding her 13th baby, Mary

Prayer for Gwen & Family Unity

*"All for" the Sacred and Eucharistic Heart of Jesus,
all through the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary,
all in union with St. Joseph*

Heavenly Father, Gwen Coniker was a model for family fidelity. She taught parents and grandparents how to sacrifice everything to fulfill God's will and become persons and families for others. Thank you for her work in the spirit of Pope John Paul II for the renewal of the Church and society through family consecration.

Gwen was a person for others who joyfully lived Your Will by fulfilling the responsibilities of each present moment. She faithfully and lovingly carried out the duties and commitments of her state in life. She showed us how to be always grateful in the deepest of trials, and how to discern and do God's will moment by moment. Gwen also showed us how to gracefully die a prolonged and painful death without complaint or self-pity.

Like Gwen, we now consecrate ourselves, and all the members of our families, and the Apostolate for Family Consecration to the Sacred and Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, through the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, in union with St. Joseph. Please help us to remember to pray "All for" before every decision and action.

Heavenly Father, we ask you to glorify Gwen. May the Church raise her to the honor of the altars for the encouragement of "family and parish consecration in the truth" to the Holy Family, and for the protection of our families from the evil one (cf. John 17:15-17).

We make our prayer and petition for the work of the Apostolate for Family Consecration, and our special requests (mention your intentions) through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Father. Hail Mary. Glory Be.

Issue Date	Book#	Section	Chapter	Sub-Chapter	Document
08-26-02	01-2	A2	R10	20	327-86



*The Coniker Family during the founding years (1970's)
of the Apostolate for Family Consecration*

When I Said I Do

*When I said I do, I had no clue,
what I'd be doing,
The mystery, how it would be,
or what the future would bring.*

REFRAIN

*Now looking back through all the years,
Smiling still after so many tears,
I know the prize was worth the price,
The joy is greater than the sacrifice.*

*God's love would give, time and again,
new life for us to welcome in,
The babies laughed, the children played,
they grew up strong and good just like I'd prayed.*

[REFRAIN]

*Now my life has proved, my words were true,
my commitment kept no matter what we went through.
Some have regrets, for their own choice,
but as for me, I only rejoice!*

[REFRAIN & VERSE ONE]

*What I have now is a family,
Something that will last for eternity.*

*O what has become of me? In giving all I am set free.
I said "I do" to you; if I could do it again,
it's the only thing I'd do.*

*Written and composed by the celibate Catholic Corps
Women's Community of The Apostolate for Family
Consecration in honor of their beloved co-founder, "Mama
C", who lived and breathed the virtue of charity and whose
motto was "love is patient, love is kind, love never ends."
For this song, ask for audiotape #198-658A \$2.00 + \$4.00 shipping*