



Joan Kathleen Brenk

September 25, 1927 - November 14, 2025

Joan Kathleen Brenk (Nichols), passed away peacefully at home surrounded by her three children on November 14, 2025 at the age of 98. Joan was born in Racine to George and Irene Nichols, grew up in Shorewood and lived for many years in Whitefish Bay. Joan was predeceased by her son John, brothers Dick, Jim and Jack of Milwaukee, Chuck of Brownsburg, IN, sisters Margaret Giesecking of Williamsburg, VA and Helen Fischer of Torrance, CA and her former husband Edward L. Brenk of Milwaukee. Joan is survived by sister Carol LeBarge (Nichols) of Upland, CA, her daughters Catherine Hoelter (Steven) of Milwaukee and Martha Stanczak (Dennis) of Mukwonago, son Robert Brenk (Christine) of Concord, NC, grandchildren Christopher Hoelter and Michael Hoelter of Milwaukee, Eric Brenk of Cologne, Germany and Andrea Brenk of Fort Myers, FL.

Joan attended St. Robert grade school, Shorewood High School, received her B.S. from Milwaukee State Teachers College and her M.S. in Administrative Leadership from UW-Milwaukee, where she also was elected to the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. She started in elementary education in 1949, was married in 1952 and switched to adult education, teaching English to New Americans while raising four children. Joan ended her career in 2012 approaching age 85 after 28 years as the Supervisor for Adult Education for the Whitefish Bay Education Dept., where she arranged events ranging from local area speaker luncheons and city tours, bus tours across the US and

Canada and as the group leader on trips to Europe. Dear to her heart was her Catholic faith and membership in Old St. Mary Parish in Milwaukee, where Joan served as a past council member, lector, eucharistic minister, tour leader, past secretary of the St. Anne Society, and a member of the St. Vincent de Paul conference. In 2005, she was elected to the Milwaukee County Department on Aging Senior Statesman Program and in 2010 to their Hall of Fame for Senior Citizens on Volunteerism. In 2010 the Whitefish Bay Masonic Lodge honored Joan as Woman of the Year. Joan also held memberships in the Shorewood Historical Society, The Milwaukee County Historical Society, Historic Milwaukee, Friends of the Whitefish Bay Library, The Irish Cultural and Heritage Center, the Irish Genealogical Society of Wisconsin, Lake Park Friends and spent many years on the board and as secretary of the Wisconsin Senior Olympics.

Joan loved working with her hands, sewed many of her own clothes and those for her children, grandchildren and for church fairs. Joan called her decorating scheme as “early attic and recent rummage” because of her concoction of her own refurnished, recaned and reupholstered pieces. Gardening was high on her list of priorities and she spent hours in her yard each summer and shared her perennials with others. She loved traveling domestically and abroad. But above all, Joan loved the Milwaukee area and considered it the “best kept secret in the country.”

She also believed that learning was a life long endeavor, and considered her high energy and curious mind gifts from God that enabled her to pursue her varied interests.

Visitation will be at Old St. Mary's Church, 844 N Broadway, downtown Milwaukee, Friday November 21, 2025 at 9:00 AM with a celebration of life Mass to follow at 10:00 AM. Interment at Holy Cross Cemetery following Mass. We will continue the celebration of Joan's life with a luncheon at the

Women's Club of Wisconsin, 813 E Kilbourn Ave at 1pm.

Gifts in Joan's memory can be made to Old St. Mary Parish or Vision Forward,
912 N. Hawley Rd, Milwaukee.

Previous Events

Visitation

NOV **21**. 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CT)

Old St. Mary's Church
844 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Celebration of Life Mass

NOV **21**. 10:00 AM (CT)

Old St. Mary's Church
844 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Luncheon

NOV **21**. 1:00 PM (CT)

Women's Club of Wisconsin
813 East Kilbourn AVE.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Tribute Wall

RM

“ Dear family of Joan K. Brenk. I was saddened to learn of the death of your Mom who was such a vibrant, active person. I knew her from my days when I served on the East side/downtown/Riverwest area, especially at her parish Old St. Mary's. Joan was active in so many activities at church and in the Whitefish Bay area. I last saw her in fall of '24. May Joan rest in the peace of the Lord whom she followed so faithfully throughout her lifetime. I will remember her in my prayers and Masses.

Rev. Michael F. Michalski - November 18, 2025 at 12:12 PM

EP

“ Joan was a true mentor. Her steady, compassionate, take-charge presence guided me through my early career, and I remain grateful for the example she set. She poured her remarkable energy into volunteering and exploring many interests, always living fully—and faithfully to her values. Elizabeth Price



Elizabeth Price - November 17, 2025 at 09:58 AM