Sister Alice Wolski
1922-2016

Sister Alice Wolski, formerly known as Sister Walter Marie, was born August 26, 1922, in Detroit. She was the fourth of six children born to Walter and Sophie (Flens) Wolski. In her autobiography, she wrote the following about her family and education.

I grew up during the Depression and I know that my parents had to struggle to keep food on the table and clothes on our backs. When I was born my parents had already lost a child and the two youngest born to our family did not live beyond the age of two. I remember the sadness in our home at the time of their deaths, but I always remember my parents as people of great faith and tremendous love.

My early education took place at Holy Name School in Detroit. I had Adrian Dominican Sisters as my teachers throughout elementary school. When it came time to choose a high school, it had to be East Commerce High School on the east side of Detroit. During my senior year, I decided that God was calling me. I kept in touch with the sisters at Holy Name. A couple of the sisters thought that God didn’t give vocations to girls in “public schools,” but Mother Gerald thought otherwise.

Sister Alice entered the postulate on January 7, 1940, and in August she received the habit and her religious name, Sister Walter Marie. Following profession on August 12, 1941, she began her twenty-two-year teaching ministry in six elementary schools.

In 1941 Sister Alice as assigned to teach at Queen of Angels School in Chicago for seven years. This was followed with six years at Sacred Heart School in Munising, Michigan. Her parents were especially pleased with this assignment because they were both from the Upper Peninsula and for them, this was “God’s Country.” The next assignment in 1954 was a total surprise because she was assigned to Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida. The following year she returned to the Midwest, where she taught at St. John School in Ypsilanti, Michigan, for one year.

Summers during the 1940s were spent studying at Siena Heights College, where Sister Alice earned a bachelor’s degree in commercial education in 1949. In the 1950s she began her graduate studies at the University of Detroit and received her master’s degree in education in 1956.

From 1956 to 1961, Sister Alice taught at St. Dominic School in Shaker Heights, Ohio, which had opened in 1952. From there, she was sent to Cincinnati, Ohio, to teach at St. Vincent Ferrer School from 1961 to 1963. And then, as Sister Alice wrote in her autobiography, “I was off to high schools.”

I went to Hoban Dominican in Cleveland for two years and then on to Dominican High School in Detroit for four happy, happy years. While at Dominican High School I was asked to consider coming to the Motherhouse to be a secretary in the secretary pool from 1969-1970. That was a year which gave me many insights about the wonderful dedication of the sisters who serve us in Adrian. Being a part of that for one year enriched me tremendously.
But the children and the classroom were calling me and I returned to teaching. I went to St. Peter School in Harper Woods, Michigan for four years. In 1974 I went to St. Jude in Detroit where I worked for sixteen glorious years.

In her autobiography, Sister Alice wrote the following about “Sunshine Calls,” a project that she began at St. Jude.

The only contact teachers usually have with parents is on the negative side, e.g., “Johnny has been misbehaving,” or, “Mary isn’t doing her homework.” What parents needed once in a while was a pat on the back or a word of support. So after much prayer, I approached the principal, pastor, etc. and began my project. At the beginning of each school year, I would send a letter to each family asking if during the course of the year I could visit their home in the early evening to share a short visit and a family prayer. It caught on like wildfire. No shop talk – just family talk and family prayer. I continued these calls as long as I resided in the convent at St. Jude.

To this day I meet young men and women (former students) or their parents and they will mention the Sunshine Call.

Alice ended her sixteen years St. Jude in June 1990 which also marked her fifty years of ministry as an Adrian Dominican. She felt it was time to explore and choose a new ministry.

In August 1990, Sister Alice had settled on ministering as a tutor at the Dominican Literacy Center in Detroit. She wrote:

At present, I am ministering at the Dominican Literacy Center [located in the Dominican High School building]. I am enjoying my new work tremendously. I certainly am here with the blessing of the Congregation. Through the guidance and help of my Chapter Prioress, Marge Naber, I was introduced to this program. I team work with Sisters Marie Schoenlein, Marlene Lieder, and Joan Liberty. After thirty-two hours of workshops and tutor classes, I am presently involved in tutoring and the joy and rewards are beyond any words.

After tutoring at the Literacy Center for eighteen years, Alice retired in June 2008 and continued to live in an apartment complex with other sisters in Warren, Michigan. When she began to experience weakness and falling, she returned to Adrian in 2013 to live at the Dominican Life Center. Sister Alice Wolski died on November 28, 2016, at the age of ninety-four and in the seventy-sixth year of her religious profession.

During the wake/remembrance service, Sister Helen Sohn, Co-Chapter Prioress of Holy Rosary Chapter, shared the following.

Alice was a heart and soul committed Adrian Dominican. In her Annals, year after year, she recorded the ways in which she endeavored to live our Mission and General Chapter Enactments through lifestyle changes or volunteer opportunities. She was committed to her Mission Group, to those with whom she shared community and most certainly, to her God, her family, and friends.

If I failed to mention that Alice loved tennis and was an excellent player, I’m sure Alice would find a way to let me know of my grievous omission; Alice not only played tennis, she gave tennis lessons right up to the point in her life when she could no longer do it. I think
she found it hard to believe that anyone would not want to play a game that gave so much enjoyment.

Sister Alice’s two nephews, Martin Eckstein and Richard Eckstein, both shared memories of their Auntie Sister. They especially treasured their private conversations with her when she asked about what was happening and how was their spiritual life. These were “catch up” times. Richard said, “Over time her audiences grew to include grand nieces and nephews as she sought to understand how this new generation was living in this modern world, to understand the role of the Spirit in their lives.”

Sister Nancyann Turner, Alice’s Chapter Prioress in the 90s, and Sister Pat Stellmah sent email messages recalling stories about Sister Alice. Their recollections included stories of Sister Alice’s gentle reminders to individuals failing (or forgetting?) to pay for articles they were taking from a yard sale and a store and her delight in being invited to attend the 50th class reunion of students she had taught at St. Dominic School, Shaker Heights, Cleveland.

The readings¹ selected for the funeral liturgy highlighted the gifts for celebrating life and the generous acts of kindness that were reflected in Sister Alice’s life of ministry. In her homily, Sister Janice Brown, OP, Director of the Dominican Literacy Center, said,

In today’s gospel, Jesus once again finds himself surrounded by people hungry for his word. He spoke as truth that fed their souls….and he loved them. Instead of sending them off to find food and shelter, he blessed what seemed to be very meager scraps of food, and the entire crowd was fed until satisfied.

Alice demonstrated the same compassion as she ministered. Her yes to God’s call carried through in her actions and in her many ministries over the years. After her golden jubilee, sensing it was time to change ministries, her Chapter Prioress, Marge Naber, introduced her to the literacy program in Detroit, where she was blessed to work as a team with Sisters Marie Damien Schoenlein, Marlene Lieder, and Joan Liberty. Alice was there for eighteen years. Besides being involved in workshops and tutor classes, the joy and rewards that came through her tutoring experience went beyond words.

Today’s first reading from Acts speaks to her knowledge that God was and remains always with her. “No wonder my heart is glad and my tongue shouts God’s praise…You have shown me the way of life and you fill me with the joy of your presence.”

Through her deep love of God and of the people she served, it would seem that Alice was fed until she was satisfied.

Left: Sisters serving on the staff of St. John the Baptist School, Ypsilanti, Michigan, in the 1955-56 school year are, back row, from left: Sisters Catherine Raymond Murnen, Victoria Moroski, and Mary Julita McCarthy; middle row, from left, Sisters Bertha Marie O’Reilly, Martin Mary Ryan, and Caroletta Going; and front row, from left, Sisters Maureen Therese Masuga, Rose Noreen Gauthier, and Alice (Walter Marie) Wolski. Right: Sister Alice, in God’s service, with her sister Dorothy and her brother Bernard, both in the military service.
Left: With her parents on the day of her Silver Jubilee celebration. Right: With her parents on the day of her reception into the novitiate.

Sister Attracta Kelly, Prioress, center, poses with Sister Alice, left, on her 75th Jubilee and Sister Mary Rita Gleason on her 80th Jubilee.