This was how Sister Dorothy Folliard, in her life story, remembered her childhood in the Chicago of the 1930s. She was the second oldest of five children – four girls and one boy – born to Michael and Margaret (O’Connor) Folliard, Irish immigrants from County Roscommon and County Kerry, respectively, who met in Chicago and married in 1921. Michael was a street car operator, while Margaret oversaw home and family.

Originally, the Folliards lived in St. Columbanus Parish, but when Sister Dorothy was two years old the family moved to St. Laurence Parish, where they lived next door to the convent and could hear the prayers and laughter of the Adrian Dominican Sisters there. “We went to the store with them as ‘companion.’ We loved them in their black cloaks and in their colorful house dresses for Friday night cleaning. We thrived in their school across the street,” Sister Dorothy recalled.

When it was time for high school, Sister Dorothy travelled a mile away to the Congregation-owned Aquinas High, where the Sisters on the faculty influenced her still more. “The thought of religious vocation was never far away. But our sisters opened us to every vocation, including the lay apostolate,” Sister Dorothy wrote.

She was originally attracted to the Maryknoll Sisters, but ultimately decided she wished to enter the Adrian Dominicans. After graduating in June 1942, she worked for a time and in October wrote to Mother Gerald Barry asking for admittance to the Congregation after Christmas.

“The objective of the Dominicans is ‘To spread to others the fruits of our own contemplation,’ and I want to make this the ideal of my life,” she wrote in her letter to Mother Gerald. “If the consecration of my life’s energies to God and His Blessed Mother for their love and glory can help in a small way to quench the Divine thirst for souls and bring their little ones into the warmth of their love, then I can not be selfish enough to refuse.”

Her request was quickly approved, and she made plans to come to Adrian late in December 1942. But a family disaster derailed those plans; the day before she would have left Chicago, her father had a stroke and was hospitalized in critical condition. Although both parents encouraged her to go as scheduled – in a letter to Mother Gerald, Sister Dorothy wrote that as they waited for the ambulance, her mother had washed Dorothy’s stockings for the trip, and that on the ride to the hospital her father was telling her to not change her plans – she knew she needed to stay home for the time being.

By late May 1943, he was well enough for her to schedule a new entrance date, and on June 3, Ascension Thursday, she took the morning train out of Chicago and arrived in Adrian that afternoon.
She was received into the novitiate in January 1944, with the religious name Sister Margaret Michaella in honor of her parents. First profession came on January 5, 1945, and that same day she was sent to teach first and second graders at St. Joseph School in St. Joseph, Michigan.

She was there for the rest of that school year and the next one, and then spent from 1946 to 1951 at St. Joseph School in Homewood, Illinois. At that point, only a year after having made final profession, she was missioned to be superior and principal at St. Edmund School in Oak Park, Illinois, where she also taught eighth grade.

During these years, Sister Dorothy received her bachelor’s degree in Latin from Siena Heights College (University) in 1950 and her master’s, also in Latin, from Loyola (Chicago) in 1955. Her Ph.D. in Greek and Latin, for which her dissertation was “Some Aspects of the Diction of Aeschylus,” came from the University of Michigan in 1963.

She finished her doctoral dissertation while teaching high school at St. John’s in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and after receiving her degree was missioned to Siena Heights, where she taught Latin, Greek, English, Scripture and theology. Regarding those years at Siena Heights (1963-68), in her life story she referred to herself as a “multi-purpose” nun.

In 1968, Dorothy was elected as a delegate to the Chapter of Renewal, something she wrote came as a surprise to her. Even more surprising to her was her election to the General Council.

The Renewal years were intense for the Congregation as a whole, and most definitely even more so for the five valiant women who served on the Council during that time: Sisters Rosemary Ferguson, Jeanne Burns, Mary Therese McCarthy, Noreen McKeough, and Dorothy.

Depleted, by her own description, by those years, Sister Dorothy returned to school when her term was up to study Scripture and theology, and earned two more master’s degrees in two years: a master’s in religious studies from the University of Chicago in 1975, and a master of theology degree from Loyola (Chicago) in 1977.

She was then invited to join the staff of the Mexican American Cultural Center (now the Mexican American Catholic College), a national center for theological education and the development of ministers to serve the Hispanic community, located in San Antonio, Texas.

She wrote in her life story:

> What a great grace it was to be there at that time! This small, faith-filled pastoral institute was deeply influenced by “the sparks from the South,” coming after Vatican II, changing forever the face of the Church – and us. I stayed for fifteen years. I could never thank God enough for the privilege of those years when I learned to look at the world in a different way, not from the vantage point of those who profit from the way things are, but of those who suffer from the way things are.

She was also on the faculty at Our Lady of the Lake College (now University) and the Oblate School of Theology, both also located in San Antonio.

In 1991, Sister Dorothy was invited to be part of the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary faculty in Mundelein, Illinois, north of Chicago. While reluctant to leave San Antonio, she found herself “in a community of incredible beauty and real holiness, of rich friendships and intense sense of purpose – to give good priests to the People of God.”
She stayed there until her seventy-fifth birthday in 1999 and then retired while her health was still good enough to enjoy her return to Adrian. Her life story concludes with these words:

*The quiet days give me an opportunity to praise God for the life I have lived. ... Our sisters are still sustaining me and calling me to be more for God. With Mary, Queen of the Poor, I can sing with a grateful heart, “Magnificat anime mea Dominum!”*

Sister Dorothy died on April 1, 2018, the day before her ninety-fourth birthday. It was Easter Sunday, a fact not lost on her Sisters.

Sharing personal memories at her wake service, held April 4, were Sister Attracta Kelly, who noted their shared Irish heritage and recalled the time a priest in Raleigh, North Carolina, a student of Dorothy’s at Mundelein, told her that Dorothy had saved his life because she was the only person who had understood him; a nephew, Kevin Krull, who remembered his aunt for the way she always took him aside at family gatherings to ask about his life and to encourage and support him; and Marist Sister Linda Sevcik, who taught with Dorothy at Mundelein.

Recollections were also read from people who could not be present, including several Adrian Dominican Sisters and Father Jim McIlhone, who had also taught at Mundelein. He wrote:

*I had a special relationship with Sister Dorothy as she was a fellow biblical professor and scholar. She inspired her students with a love of the Bible and also modeled how to make the scriptures a part of one’s own life in order to present their meaning to others. … May she now enjoy the rewards of a life well-lived making God’s word come alive in the hearts of so many people.*

In her homily at Sister Dorothy’s funeral Mass the next day, Sister Pat Walter called her a “consummate teacher and preacher” for whom “to contemplate and to give to others the fruits of contemplation” was a fitting summary of her life. Indeed, though Sister Pat would have had no way of knowing this, it was what Sister Dorothy, all those years earlier, had written to Mother Gerald was “the ideal of my life.”

Continued Sister Pat,

*In the past years, Dorothy became a person of fewer and fewer words. She seemed centered even more deeply in the one who is beyond all words.*

*… Jesus says we are God’s gift to him. In the middle of the night, Holy Saturday-Easter Sunday, Jesus got his wish with Dorothy. He gave himself a present. … and [for us] who remain, the love with which Christ loved his disciples, is present among us. The love Dorothy has showered upon us is part of us, and we extend that love in circles ever widening.*
Left: Members of the 2004 Diamond Jubilee crowd are, from left: Sisters Dorothy Folliard, Mary Jo O’Hanlon, Eleanor Dougherty, Mary Scheibel, Laverne Feeney, Jean Hitzeman, Rosemary Ferguson, and Rita Schiltz. Right: Sister Dorothy’s graduation photo, Aquinas High School, Chicago, 1942

Sister Dorothy (second row from bottom, second from left) with her fourth-grade classmates at St. Laurence School in Chicago
Left: Generalate Officers elected at the 1968 General Chapter are: front row, from left: Sister Thomas Raymond (Jeanne) Burns, Mother Laurence Edward (Rosemary) Ferguson, and Sister Mary Paul (Noreen) McKeough, and back row, from left, Sisters James Therese (Arthemise) Cassanova, Sister Julita Marie Williams, Sister Christopher (Kathryn) Noonan, Sister John Bride (Mary Catherine) Jordan, and Sister Margaret Michaella (Dorothy) Folliard. Right: At St. Joseph in Homewood, Illinois, late 1940s.

Left: Sister Lois Paha (left) visits with Sister Dorothy during a farewell party for Sister Dorothy given by Mexican American Cultural Center, 1991.

Left: Sister Dorothy (back row, far right) and Sister Veronica Mendez, RCD, pose with seminarians from Mundelein, Illinois, during a visit to San Antonio, 1992.