Sister Lorraine Pepin, OP
1934-2019

I came into this world on November 20, 1934. … It was my brother Don’s birthday the next day on the twenty-first of November. My dad told him he had an early birthday present. He was a bit disappointed as he was hoping to get a toy fire engine but instead received this crying baby sister.

So begins the autobiography of Sister Lorraine Pepin, which she subtitled I Have Called You by Name … You Are Mine and ended several pages later with these words from the Magnificat: “My soul magnifies the Lord for he who is mighty has done great things for me.”

Sister Lorraine was born in Escanaba, Michigan, to John Baptist and Edna (Dubord) Pepin. She was the youngest of twelve children – nine boys and three girls – born into the family. “Although it was Depression time my parents must have thought it was cheaper by the dozen,” she wrote.

She grew up surrounded by aunts, uncles and cousins, in what she called a “welcoming and open” home. Her parents were the greatest influences of her life, and it was through their example of strong faith and prayer that she found God at a very young age. Her mother’s commitment to morning prayer and the deep spirituality of her father, and the way they all prayed the rosary together as a family – especially during the war years, she wrote, for four of the boys were in the service – all made a lasting impression upon her.

Sister Lorraine attended public school through fourth grade and then in fifth grade enrolled at St. Anne’s School, where her teachers were the Franciscan sisters from Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Her first two years of high school were at Escanaba High, after which she attended St. Joseph High, staffed by the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

She met the Adrian Dominican Sisters when St. Thomas the Apostle Parish was established near her home, and became involved in the parish CYO group and sang in the choir, which was directed by Sister John Baptist Dowd. “I was attracted to her joy, happiness, and bubbling spirit,” she wrote, and in her senior year, discerning her call to religious life, she wrote to Mother Gerald Barry seeking admission to the Congregation.

Her autobiography contains a story about her trip to the shoe store to buy the black laceup “old lady” shoes needed for her postulant outfit: she told the clerk she wanted to buy shoes for her sick mother, who happened to wear the same size she did, but she would need to try them on.

She arrived in Adrian – black shoes ready to go on her feet – on June 22, 1952, and soon enough found herself getting into enough trouble that she was warned she was going to be sent home. “I remember begging to stay, which was good reverse psychology because then I wanted to stay,” she wrote.

She received the habit and her religious name, Sister Johneda, on December 30, 1952, and upon the completion of her canonical novitiate year she was assigned to Our Lady of Good Counsel in Chicago, where she was responsible for teaching fifty-seven first graders.
In all, “I spent thirty wonderful years as an elementary teacher,” she wrote. After her six-month assignment to Our Lady of Good Counsel, she was missioned to Our Lady of Sorrows, Detroit (1954-55), St. Columbanus, Chicago (1955-57), St. Carthage, Chicago (1957 to December 1958) and then, when she made final profession, Mother Gerald “surprised me” by appointing her to St. Augustin School in Des Moines, Iowa.

Sister Lorraine was in Des Moines for three years and then asked to be missioned closer to her aging parents. That brought her back to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, where she taught at St. Gregory’s in Newberry (1961-65) and then at St. Joseph’s in Sault Ste. Marie (1965-71), where she developed a method of using positive reinforcement that “changed my whole way of teaching” and was written up in the publication New Ideas in Michigan Education.

She earned her bachelor’s degree, majoring in history, from Siena Heights College (University) in 1961, and during her time at St. Joseph’s earned her master’s degree in special education from Northern Michigan University. When St. Joseph School closed, she was invited to open the learning disability lab at Holy Spirit School in Norway, Michigan, and taught there for five years (1971-76).

“This was a thrilling and exciting experience for me,” she wrote. Then, she was asked to start yet another new program: the kindergarten at the merged Dickinson Area Catholic School in Iron Mountain, Michigan.

After two years there (1976-78), Sister Lorraine wanted to be closer to her ailing mother – her father having died in 1962 – and accepted a position teaching kindergarten at Holy Name School, Escanaba. She became certified in pastoral counseling by the Cardinal Meyer Institute in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1979, opening the door to a new mission field: parish work.

Edna died in 1980 and Sister Lorraine, accompanied by Sister Reta Drexler, headed from Northern Michigan to the Atlantic coast of Florida where she, Sister Reta, Sister Ruth Rabideau, and Sister Celestine Guttman worked at St. Helen’s Parish in Vero Beach. Sisters Lorraine and Reta ministered in the Youth Ministry program, and all four Sisters were part of the Neighborhood Apostolate program.

Sister Lorraine then taught kindergarten for a few months (August 1981 to January 1982) before returning to Adrian to spend a year and a half directing the physical exercise program at Maria Health Care Center. In 1983, she went back to Iron Mountain to teach first and second grades at the Dickinson Area Catholic School.

Then, in 1986, she and Sister Reta were invited to return to Florida, this time to work in parish ministry and religious education at St. Jude Parish in Tequesta. “The people of St. Jude Parish became like family to us,” she wrote in her autobiography.

… I thank God for my nineteen years of ministry at St. Jude’s Parish and for all the people who have touched my life and have been so good to me. When I look back I marvel at the presence of the Holy Spirit’s direction in my many varied ministries at St. Jude Parish. God honored our “yes” and worked in and through me and Reta to do great and wonderful things for the people of God. I give honor and glory to God for this fruitful ministry and for the many graces and blessings of my nineteen years at St. Jude Parish in Tequesta, Florida.

Their ministry included RCIA work, baptismal preparation, creating small faith-sharing communities, and visiting local nursing homes and assisted living facilities weekly for Communion and faith sharing.
Sisters Lorraine and Reta ministered at the parish until mid-2004 but continued to live in Tequesta until April 2005, when they returned to Adrian to take up residence at the Dominican Life Center. She continued to serve in several ways around campus, including co-managing, with Reta, the “Powder Mill” shop at the Dominican Life Center and teaching English to four Iraqi sisters who lived on campus at the time.

“The Lord has blessed me with a wonderful life,” she said to conclude her autobiography. “I thank God for all that has been and for all that is and for all that will be in the future.”

Sister Lorraine died of a severe infection on June 8, 2019, at ProMedica Bixby Medical Center in Adrian. She was eighty-four years old and in her sixty-fourth year of religious profession. Her nephew, Father Darryl Pepin of St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Bark River, Michigan, celebrated the funeral Mass – for which the closing song, in an echo of the ending line of her autobiography, was Feargal King’s *Dominican Magnificat*.

“Lorraine, your life certainly did magnify the Lord,” said Sister Mary Jane Lubinski, Adrian Crossroads Chapter Prioress, in her eulogy at the wake service the evening before Sister Lorraine was taken to her final resting place in the Congregational cemetery. “Rest well from all your labors. We love you. Your spirit is alive, here in our midst.”
Center: First Holy Communion
From left: Sister Lorraine Pepin with her nephew, Father Darryl Pepin, son of Donald; Sister Lorraine Pepin, left, and Sister Reta Drexler.

Celebrating their Golden Jubilees in 2002 are, from left: Sisters Lorraine Sinn, Lorraine Pepin, Mary Ann Caulfield (Chapter Prioress), Reta Drexler, and Frances Madigan.
Members of the 2012 Diamond Jubilee Class are: back row, from left, Sisters Dorothy Booms, Lorraine Pepin, Carolyn Nelson, Reta Drexler, Arlene Marie Kosmatka, Frances Madigan, and Attracta Kelly (Prioress); middle row, from left, Sisters Kathryn Hartnett, Marguerite Renuart, Maureen Keeler, Lorraine Sinn, and Cora Marie Campbell; and front row, from left, Sisters Anne Cenci, Ann Kelly, Joann Weigang, and Magdalena Ezoe.