Sister Theresia Scheuer, OP
1931-2019

As Sister Theresia Scheuer's funeral Mass drew to a close, those gathered in St. Catherine Chapel sang a closing song that surely summed up Sister Theresia's life: Robert Lowry's “How Can I Keep from Singing?”

Music was intertwined with Sister Theresia's life from her earliest days as a piano teacher's daughter all the way to her last years, during which she shared her gifts as a singer, cantor, pianist, and organist with her Congregation. In between, she taught music at several schools in Ohio and Michigan, and her last twenty years in active ministry were spent as the music director at St. Alphonsus Parish, Deerfield, Michigan.

Sister Theresia was born Mary Susan Scheuer in Adrian on March 28, 1931, to Edward and Opal (Ott) Scheuer. She was a twin, but the other baby, also a girl, did not survive.

Despite her baptismal name, from early on she was known simply as Susie. She was the youngest of three Scheuer daughters, after Ahlene, the eldest, and JoAnn.

Ahlene “did not at first fancy the idea of another one in the family,” Sister Theresia wrote in an autobiography that dates back to her early high school years. “But gradually she became accustomed to the idea and didn’t think me quite so bad after all. JoAnn, who is between Ahlene and me in age, was quite thrilled.”

Little Susie soon began doing everything Jo did, even to the point of going to bed herself when Jo was sick. On school days, when Ahlene and Jo readied themselves to leave the house, Susie would pack up her books and put her coat on, and then when the older girls left she would take off her coat and sit at a little table with her books, pretending she was studying. “If Mama would call me I wouldn’t even answer because I was in school,” she wrote.

The family lived in Metamora, Ohio, near the Michigan-Ohio state line. They moved several times during Sister Theresia’s first five years, the last time to a farm just outside town.

Her first- through third-grade years were spent in public school in Metamora, where her activities included playing cornet in the school band. She also learned piano from her mother. All three of the Scheuer girls were musically inclined; Ahlene played alto horn while Jo played trumpet, and either two or all three of them often played together.

When it came time for fourth grade, and when Jo was entering seventh grade, the pair enrolled at St. Mary’s School in nearby Assumption, Ohio, which was staffed by Adrian Dominican Sisters. Sister Theresia stayed there through her sophomore year of high school.

She told the story of her call to religious life in an article Jolene Witt (a Co-worker at the Motherhouse) wrote for the May-June 2008 issue of The St. Alphonsus Reminder, the newsletter for St. Alphonsus Parish in Deerfield, Michigan, upon the occasion of her impending retirement from “St. Al’s.”

*Well, first of all, I was going to be a nurse when I was real young. It wasn’t until the seventh grade, when a priest came to our school and talked about vocations, that I*
began to hear God calling me to join the Adrian Dominican Sisters. At first I was a bit scared by the whole idea of joining this way of life. I was also hoping I was mistaken; that maybe this wasn’t really God calling me.

And so in the eighth grade she decided she would pray the Rosary every night for an entire year. “I would say it as fast as I could to get all other thoughts out of my mind and to keep me too ‘busy’ to hear the call should it come again,” she said.

When that year was about up, she was praying the Rosary one night when the “call” did indeed come. “And I literally froze in my bed,” she said. “I told God that if this was Him calling me, He had to let me know, because this wasn’t anything I could fool around with. I couldn’t even spend one night away from home without getting homesick.”

The call became undeniable one particular day in fall 1946, her sophomore year, and the next June, at the age of sixteen, she wrote to Mother Gerald Barry seeking admittance to the Congregation. She entered that September, spent the next year at St. Joseph Academy to complete her high school credits, and was received as a novice and given her religious name in August 1948.

With just one exception, Sister Theresia’s entire ministerial life was spent in Michigan. Her first assignment after her canonical novitiate year was St. Dominic’s School in Detroit, where she was assigned to teach fourth through sixth grades as well as music. After five years there (1949-54), she was sent to Ascension School, Harvey, Illinois, where she spent six years (1954-60), followed by one year (1960-61) at Sts. Peter and Paul School, Ruth, Michigan. During her years in Harvey, she completed her bachelor’s degree in music at Siena Heights College (University).

The rest of her teaching ministry came on the high school level: two years (1961-63) at what became Port Huron Catholic High, Port Huron, Michigan, and twelve years (1963-75) at St. Joseph Academy. Her time at the Academy also saw her earn her master’s degree in music education from Michigan State University in 1965.

She left classroom teaching in 1975 to become the liturgist at St. Mary’s Parish in Adrian, and also that year began what would be thirteen years of service to the Diocese of Lansing as coordinator of the Ministry for Parish Musicians. After four years at St. Mary’s, she became the music minister at St. Alphonsus Parish, and remained in that ministry for the next twenty-nine years – years which she described in that story for the parish newsletter as “great, happy, peaceful years [that] have given me the greatest learning experiences of my life, for which I will always be grateful!” When she left “St. Al’s” in 2008, it marked the end of ninety-four years of ministry in that parish by the Adrian Dominican Sisters.

But “retirement” did not mean the end of Sister Theresia’s ministry. She served the Congregation itself by singing in the choir and serving as a cantor and accompanist, and was a driving force behind a “United Movement for Peace” involving the local community over the last year of her life.

When the Congregation held the huge gathering it called Embracing the Future/Encuentro con El Futuro/Pagyakap sa Hinaharap in late July and early August 2019, she was one of the three sisters who directed sections of the assembly in singing the song composed for the event by Sister Gloria Korhonen.

That was the lasting memory Judith Engle, a former sister who became an Adrian Dominican Associate, had of Sister Theresia. In a message read at Sister Theresia’s wake service by Chapter Prioress Sister Mary Jane Lubinski, Judith wrote: “Whenever it was our turn to sing, she brought us in with a wonderfully joyous energy. Her face absolutely glowed with her joy, she was so ‘in her element’
directing a choral group! I’ll never forget her radiance and energy as she led us, doing what she most loved. How good, that she had that final moment of being in her glory before going home to God’s glory.”

Theresa did indeed go “home to God’s glory” just a few weeks later, on September 6, 2019, after a brief illness. Both her wake service and her funeral Mass were filled with music not only from her beloved Congregation but also from several St. Alphonsus\(^1\) parishioners, and St. Catherine’s Chapel was filled with both Theresa’s family and her “St. Al’s” family.

Father Jack Loughran, the former pastor at St. Alphonsus, preached the funeral homily.

\[\text{Sister Theresia – or Susie, as her family refers to her – was a unique woman. Of course, you can’t think of Theresia without music in your heart. Music was how she related to us, to the world and to the Lord and enhanced those same relationships for us.}\]

\[\text{But there was more. The day I heard that she had been placed in hospice care, I was driving down to Toledo for a meeting and, of course, she was on my mind. I found myself thinking over and over, Theresia was a woman who walked with the Lord.}\]

\[\text{Theresa lived virtues that revealed to us the God of our hearts. A woman filled with deep faith, an inimitable spirit of hope and optimism, she was creative, generous and loving.}\]

\[\text{… She was simple and uncomplicated, joyful, confident and much, much more.}\]

\[\text{… Sister Theresia, as an Adrian Dominican, had a whole host of Dominican saints to inspire and guide her. But, as an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, I think the patron of my community has something to say about Theresia. … “We should live in this world as though our spirits were already in heaven.”}\]

\[\text{… I suggest to you that she lived the words of Francis de Sales more fully than we know – while her body was here, her spirit was in heaven.}\]

\(^1\) St. Alphonsus merged with St. Peter’s Parish in nearby Blissfield to form Light of Christ Parish.
Left: Sister Theresia at the age of 8, 1939. Right: Sister Theresia Scheuer on the day of her Reception into the Novitiate, August 10, 1948

Left: Sister Theresia during her Master’s Degree Recital. Right: Sisters Theresia Scheuer, left, and Magdalena Ezoe, Christmas 1974
Left: Sister Theresia Scheuer reads to her niece, 1976. Right: With her grand-niece Susie, Easter 1981

Left: Members of the choir singing at the June 23, 2018 Jubilee Mass are, from left, Sisters Barbara Gass, Joella Miller, Theresia Scheuer, and Patricia Walter. Right: Sister Theresia, December 2018

Members of the 2008 Diamond Jubilee August Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Patricia DeMay, Theresa Sinnamon, Angelica McGuire, Dorothy Worthy, Barbara J. Carroll, and Audrey Hull and front row, from left, Sisters Anne Marie Meagher, Mary Declan Foss, Margaret Ann Reardon, Margaret Karam, Theresia Scheuer, and Ann Benedict Williams.