Sister Agnes Peplinski, OP
1932-2020

“… I just wanted you to know how much we loved having her around at Dominican Literacy Center. She was always so perky. She did those mundane things in a creative way, like discovering that Turtle Wax was best at getting our whiteboards clean. She made sure that our work stations were clean and organized. And she loved to laugh.”

These words were part of an email sent to Adrian by Kimberly Williams, executive director of the Dominican Literacy Center in Detroit, upon hearing of the death of Sister Agnes Peplinski. Helping out at the literacy center had been one of Sister Agnes’ numerous volunteer ministries for many years.

Agnes Ann Peplinski was born March 14, 1932, in Parisville, Michigan, to Matthew and Lucy (Zmich) Peplinski. Parisville, which is an unincorporated community within Paris Township in Huron County, at the tip of Michigan’s “Thumb,” was one of the first Polish settlements in the United States, and both sets of Agnes’ grandparents were immigrants to that locale from Prussia, making them a combination of Polish and German.

Like many other Huron County residents, Matthew was a farmer. He and Lucy had eighteen children in all, two of whom died in infancy; Lucy herself died in April 1947. Agnes attended grade schools in Forestville, Minden City, and Port Sanilac, Michigan, and graduated from Sandusky High School in Sandusky, Michigan, in May 1950.

She wrote in her letter to Mother Gerald seeking entrance to the Congregation that she had come to know the Adrian Dominican Sisters through summer school programs in Port Sanilac; Sister Mary Richard Rea had taught her particular class, and it was at that time, in eighth grade, that she knew she wanted to enter religious life. A high school retreat at Dominican High School in Detroit cemented her choice of which community it was to be.

Sister Agnes entered the Adrian Dominicans in September 1950 and received the novice’s habit and her religious name, Sister Richard Therese, in August of the next year. She wrote many years later that because she could not get a good combination of her parents’ names for her religious name, she chose Richard, for her nephew, and Therese for St. Therese.

After making first profession in August 1952, her first mission was to St. Mary’s School in Rockwood, Michigan, where she taught a large class (she described it as “wall to wall”) of seventh graders. “I think I was more fearful of them than they were of me,” she wrote, but then added, “They were a grand group.”

In all, Sister Agnes spent thirty years as a teacher; after St. Mary (1952-53) came St. Lawrence, Cleveland, Ohio (1953-55); St. Lawrence, Detroit (1955-58); St. Peter, Harper Woods, Michigan (1958-64); Holy Name, Detroit (1964-65); St. Henry, Cleveland (1965-66); St. Jude, Detroit (1966-67); and St. Ambrose, Detroit (1967-69). She earned her bachelor’s degree in home economics from Siena Heights College (University) in 1958.
In August 1969, she was granted a leave of absence from the Congregation that lasted five years; she returned in 1974 and went to Ubly, Michigan, just west of where she had grown up in Huron County, to teach at St. John School. Following that, she taught at St. Anthony School in Casa Grande, Arizona, in 1976-77, and then at St. Raphael School in Los Angeles from 1977 to 1985.

After three years away from teaching, living a year each in Dearborn Heights, Michigan; Las Vegas, and Detroit, she returned to the classroom one more time, teaching at St. Brendan School in Detroit from 1988 to 1990. After that, she continued to live in Utica and Warren, Michigan, volunteering at the Dominican Literacy Center, for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, in her parish, and in other ways.

Sister Agnes moved to the Dominican Life Center in 2018 and died there on January 18, 2020, at the age of eighty-seven. She was the last of the Peplinski siblings to enter eternal life, but she left behind a sister-in-law and many nieces, nephews, and great-nieces and -nephews, as well as their spouses.

One of those nephews, Jerry Husson, gave a detailed remembrance of his aunt at her wake service, telling of her love of all four of Detroit’s professional sports teams as well as University of Michigan and Michigan State University athletics. “If she was able to go to a Tigers (baseball) game, she would get so excited! She loved the game, she loved the players, and she loved the atmosphere,” he said. “As far as sports fans go, few were more dedicated to their teams than Sister Agnes.”

But her affinity for sports was not limited to being a spectator; in her younger days, Jerry said, she had loved to play baseball and softball and was even “up for a round of kick-ball or croquet when the opportunity presented itself.” She also enjoyed playing bingo with her nieces and nephews and “loved nothing more than to play pinochle, or any other card game, with her friends and family.”

Jerry also remembered his aunt as someone who faithfully sent cards to people for all occasions, always with heartfelt thoughts added in, and who loved attending family events no matter how far away. “One observation that was made about Sister Agnes was that ‘she was always there,’” he said. “This really is a wonderful reflection of her life outside the convent in terms of how she interacted with her family.”

Sister Agnes’ love of family and card games, especially pinochle, was also remembered by Sister Lorraine Brennan, with whom she lived in Los Angeles. Sister Lorraine recalled as well that Sister Agnes was a talented baker who made terrific lemon pies from the lemons on one of the fruit trees right in their yard.

Sister Lorraine also described her friend’s love of traveling and how the two went many places together, from Oregon and California to Arizona, Mexico, and Las Vegas. When it came to the latter, in fact, according to Jerry’s remembrance, one of Sister Agnes’ fondest memories was meeting singer Wayne Newton in Las Vegas. “He treated Sister Agnes and some other Sisters to a great time,” he said. “He was extremely gracious and brought a lot of joy to them all.”

Yet another remembrance was sent in by Sister Joseph Eilese Hukle of West Palm Beach, Florida, who wrote that during her time in formation postulants were partnered with novices in order to become oriented to the rules, customs, and schedules of religious life. Sister Joseph Eilese was the novice assigned to partner with Agnes the postulant, and “God looked down from heaven and made a match,” she wrote, for the two began a lifelong friendship at that time.
“I feel blest to have been assigned to be her ‘guardian angel,’” she wrote. “And this evening I ask God, our Divine Savior, to welcome Agnes into His loving embrace. I feel that I have a special friend in heaven.

“God bless you, Agnes. I promise to hold our friendship via heaven-earth as I share my prayers with and for you.”
From left: From left, Sisters Agnes Peplinski, Marie Elizabeth Doherty, and Maris Stella Beaufait. Posing with Ophelia the camel during a Holy Land retreat at Weber Center in Adrian are, standing, from left, Sisters Jean Annette Rudolph and Sheila Delaney and seated, from left, Sisters Anneliese Sinnott and Agnes Peplinski.
Right: Standing, from left, Sisters Mary Saynay, Mary Helen Smolbrook, Michael Ann Glombowski, Alice Wolski, and Agnes Peplinski, and seated, Sister Joan Liberty

Standing, from left, are Associate Mercedes Fitzsimmons and Sisters Jeanine Boivin, Sheila Delaney, Virginia Beattie, and Mary Ann Konieski and seated, from left, Sisters Agnes Peplinski and Maris Stella Beaufait.
From left: Sister Agnes poses with a mural of the mission statement of the Dominican Literacy Center in Detroit. Sister Agnes with two of her grand nieces

Members of the 2011 Diamond Jubilarian Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Attracta Kelly (Prioress), Julianne Wolny, Jeannine Holway, Anne Liam Lees, Judith Ann Lieder, and Agnes Peplinski; middle row, from left, Sisters Elizabeth Lynch, Rita Brunett, Thérèse Haggerty, Mary Daria Herbella, Catherine Ahern, and Elisa Joan Doherty; and front row, from left, Sisters Dolores Marie Dolan, Dolores Slosar, Nancy Hanna, Celine Marie Regan, Marian Edward Guethlein, and Clara Ann Budenz.