



About 2015

Sister Mary (M. Stanislaus) Michna, OP
Born to earthly life: August 15, 1919
Religious profession: August 4, 1938
Entered eternal life: December 14, 2015

I have called you by name: you are mine.
Is 43, 1

Mary Lorraine Michna was born on August 15, 1919, in Racine, Wisconsin,

the eighth of Edward and Gertrude Thielen Michna's eventual ten children, five girls and five boys.

She was, she would write later, the first of her family to be born in a hospital, and was one of the few children to inherit her Grandpa Thielen's deep blue eyes. One day while still in the hospital, Gertrude was holding the infant brought to her by a nurse. When the child opened her eyes, Gertrude realized it was not her daughter! The situation was quickly remedied — for which Mary would often thank God, noting that her "life story could have been so very different."



Baby Mary



First Communion

She loved being part of a large, loving family in a neighborhood filled with "good kids."

One summer day when she was quite young, Mary recounted in her autobiography, she found a firecracker. She hid it until the Fourth of July and then got matches and went to the front yard to light it. She did everything she had seen her brothers do, but there was no "bang"; so she bent over to see what was wrong. The firecracker exploded, burning her face and eyes. Recovery was slow but complete, and she had learned a powerful lesson.

Mary had been baptized at Saint Joseph's Parish in Racine, and attended elementary school there. She found learning



Mary as a postulant, with nephew Tom

easy, and received a tuition-free scholarship to Saint Catherine’s High School. Her mother had once told Mary that when she herself was young everyone had thought she would become a sister; that conversation led Mary to the realization that this was in fact what she wanted. The day her brother Ralph married, August 30, 1934, she left home and entered the convent at 1209 Park Avenue. She was fifteen.

At her reception into the novitiate on August 4, 1936, she was given the name Sister M. Stanislaus of Mary of the Immaculate Conception — a complete surprise, since this was not one of the three possible names she had suggested when each postulant had been asked to list three choices. She would, however, come to love the name because of her patron Saint Stanislaus Kostka’s love for the Virgin Mary. (In 1968 she would return to her baptismal name.)

She would be forever grateful for the instruction in theology which the novices received from the chaplain, Father Cyril Wahle, OP.

Sister Stanislaus had her first taste of teaching during the second year of her novitiate, when she substituted in the first grade at Holy Name School, just a few blocks from the motherhouse. After the celebration of her first profession on August 4, 1938, she was missioned to Saint John’s School in Little Chute, Wisconsin, where she continued that teaching ministry, mentored by Sister Mary George Orth.

On August 5, 1944, she pronounced her final vows at the motherhouse. After one more year in Little Chute, she was transferred to Assumption Grotto in Detroit to teach eighth grade, and two years later was assigned to Saint John’s in South Milwaukee as local superior, principal, and eighth-grade teacher. In the summer of 1951, after several summers’ work, she was awarded her baccalaureate degree in education from Dominican College.



About 1940



About 1953

In 1952, she was asked to assume responsibility for the senior aspirancy (high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors looking to eventual entry into the Racine Dominican community while attending Saint Catherine’s High School), a role she filled for eight years.

From there she moved in 1960 to Hubbardston, Michigan, to serve as superior and principal of Saint John’s elementary and high school. When



Sisters Stanislaus and Rose Albert Thering with aspirants, 1952



About 1960

the high school closed in 1964, she was assigned to Holy Name in Kimberly, Wisconsin. Three years later she was transferred to Saint Clement's in Center Line, Michigan, as high school teacher and director of religious education.

Meanwhile, she was spending her summers studying at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, where she received her master's degree in theology and scripture in 1955. A second master's degree was earned at Saint Xavier College in Chicago in 1968.

In 1968, she resumed her baptismal name, Mary. That fall she became the Milwaukee Archdiocese's first full-time director of religious education at Saint Veronica's Parish. In these post-Vatican II years, new doors were opening, and Mary became part of a new archdiocesan CCD (Confraternity for Christian Doctrine) Committee, at that time consisting of only two full-time staff. Mary asked for and was granted a staff of eight, creating a new Office of

Religious Education. Among other accomplishments, she was responsible for encouraging every parish to hire a professional director of religious education, and for the establishment of a "Valuing Your Sexuality" program.

After two years in the archdiocesan office, Mary was feeling the need for further study and in 1970–1971 enrolled in a new year-long certification program at Corpus Christi College in London, England. She then returned to Milwaukee for another six years, during which she brought nationally prominent speakers to the archdiocese, established the Milwaukee Archdiocese Directors of Religious Education Association (MAREDA), and was active in the National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education (NCDD). Then suddenly and without explanation, on the accession of Archbishop Rembert Weakland to the See of Milwaukee in 1978, she was released from her position. After interviews in several other dioceses, she moved to Salinas, California, as Diocesan Religious Education Director.

Two years later, wishing to be closer to her Racine Dominican sisters again, Mary moved to Saint Matthias Parish in Milwaukee as Religious Education Director. "These two years were wonderful!" she said, noting that the parish motto became "womb to tomb," as faith formation was inaugurated

on all levels.

As lay Catholics began to pursue spiritual direction in the 1980s, Mary wanted to assist them, but didn't feel sufficiently prepared. So in 1983 she pursued certification in spirituality at Fordham University. Upon her return to Racine, she became director of the Siena Retreat Center. After retiring from that position eight years later, she continued to minister in the retreat center and as a spiritual director into her nineties. For almost twenty years, until



Spiritual guide



Lover of Scripture

her eighty-fifth birthday, she also directed retreats at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Oshkosh for ten days each summer.

In September of 1990 Mary considered ministry in Africa with another Racine Dominican, Sister Celia Evers. While she wanted to go, her prayer and discernment led her

to stay in the States. She did not know why; but that November she was diagnosed with cancer of the spleen and underwent surgery and chemotherapy. The cancer, however, advanced into her stomach and duodenum, and chemotherapy was advised again. Convalescence was long, but eventually she returned to doing spiritual direction and conducting Scripture classes.

About this time, too, she began a mutually rewarding fourteen-year ministry in faith formation with the women at Ellsworth



Mary and Bishop Sklba with prison volunteers



Make mine an old-fashioned!

Correctional Center in Union Grove, accompanied by various other volunteers and assisted at confirmation times by Bishop Richard Sklba. Only when declining health limited her energy did she discontinue her weekly visits.

Mary had long wanted to write a book using the parable stories to help people pray with the Scriptures. She did write that book, entitled *Scripture Stories: A Fountain for Prayer*.

Mary loved her Racine Dominican sisters. She was always hospitable, welcoming, and gracious — reveling particularly in preparing cocktails for parties with the sisters who formed her small living group at Siena Center.

She was deeply prayerful and hope-filled, even in her final often difficult months at Lakeshore Manor, where she moved in March of 2014. “Searching and following God’s will in my life has been very important, and I have been very blessed,” she had written in her autobiography. That attitude continued to her last days.

Mary died at Lakeshore on December 14, 2015. She was ninety-six years old, and had been a professed for seventy-seven years. She was survived by her sister Irene, her sister-in-law Lois, and many nieces, nephews, grandnieces, and grandnephews.



Bishop Richard Sklba presided at her funeral liturgy at Siena Center on the morning of December 19. Her body was interred at Holy Cross Cemetery in Caledonia the following Monday.