



Sister Irene McCarthy, OP

Born to earthly life: April 23, 1926
Religious profession: August 15, 1948
Entered eternal life: November 11, 2016

*"I've gone to the Concert,
where Saints and Angels sing..."*

Dave Pipitone

HAVING SPENT 56 OF HER 68 YEARS AS A RACINE DOMINICAN teaching music, giving piano, organ, violin and guitar lessons, as well as directing choirs and serving as a parish musician, Sister Irene McCarthy is certainly enjoying that Heavenly Concert now. No one would be surprised to find her playing the organ for it! Even in her final years, S. Irene continued to freely share her gift of music at Becker-Schoop Center, playing residents' favorite songs and initiating sing-alongs. Daily checking the bulletin board for birthdays, she would celebrate each resident by playing "Happy Birthday" on the piano while leading everyone in song.

Patricia Jane was the eldest of three children born to Callahan and Genevieve McCarthy of South Milwaukee, WI. Brothers Tom and Jim followed. Pat's father worked at Bucyrus-Erie surface and underground mining equipment company. When Pat was a high school junior, the company invited her to work in the engineering department, where she continued employment after graduating high school. On her way to work each morning, she played the organ for the 7 a.m. Mass at St. John's Parish, where Racine Dominicans taught in the school. Bucyrus-Erie offered her a full scholarship to earn an engineering degree at Marquette University on the same day Mother Romana, who heard the young woman play at Mass, asked her to "give a year to the Lord" by serving the Racine Dominicans. Pat's father was dismayed when she chose to teach third grade in Racine rather than accept the Marquette scholarship.

Following that year, Pat entered the community, receiving the name Sister Irene and beginning her teaching career. With the country at war, children were not allowed to play outside during the black-outs, so young S. Irene led the whole school in a sing-along each day at lunchtime.

S. Irene's love for music and deep desire to serve others were her hallmarks. "I always had a choir and a church organ somewhere," she noted in her 2007 oral history. "I feel my students and I are enabling people to express their prayers more beautifully when we play the organ at liturgies." She continued giving music lessons until she was nearly 80, and enjoyed playing the organ for the Jubilars musical ensemble till age 81.

Throughout her years in ministry, S. Irene often coordinated the music for special liturgical celebrations, including the first Mass of a young priest named Richard Sklba. And when at Becker-Schoop, she saved the day when a pianist scheduled for the annual memorial service failed to appear. S. Irene graciously stepped in, and the families expressed appreciation for both her willingness and her talent. To the delight of residents and visitors alike, she often played the piano in the Becker-Schoop reception area.

Appreciated for her joyful spirit in serving others as much as for her musical talent, S. Irene will be missed. "She was always happy and exuberant," her sister-in-law Betty said, remembering how S. Irene would gather nieces and nephews around the piano to sing whenever she visited. And S. Jean Ackerman recalled how "humble and generous" S. Irene was. "I will treasure her for all she was and will always be in my heart" – a sentiment shared by many who knew and loved the kind and ever-smiling Sister Irene McCarthy.