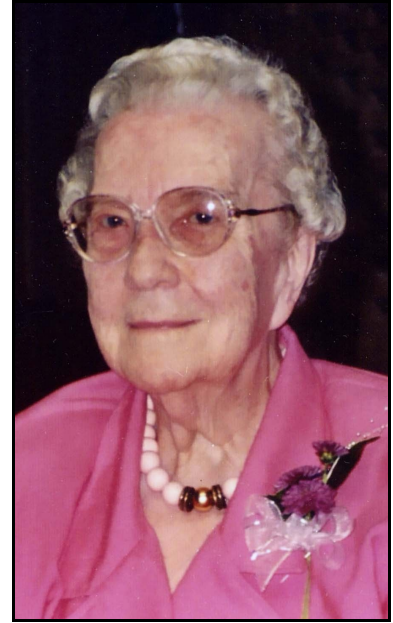


**Sister M. Sheila Ehr, OP**  
**Born to earthly life: December 23, 1912**  
**Religious profession: August 4, 1943**  
**Entered eternal life: July 10, 2012**

*I will walk in the presence of the Lord  
in the land of the living!*

*Psalms 116, 9*



60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, 2003



Baby Liz with her father

On December 23, 1912, Nicholas and Alma Benzing Ehr of Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Milwaukee welcomed their first child. At her baptism they named her Elizabeth Marie, but to her



Look at me!



Already her trademark smile!



First Communion

Even as a child, Liz wanted to become, as she said, a sister-teacher. But she graduated from high school during the Great Depression, and her family depended on her as the eldest of eight; so the fulfillment of her dream had to be delayed. She found jobs in clerical work, dressmaking, child care, culinary arts, operating an elevator, and soliciting ads.

Then, when she was twenty-five, with a “small fortune of \$50,” she boarded the train and headed west to San Francisco, stopping to soak in the wonders of the Grand Canyon along the way. She worked first for two years as a practical nurse in the convent of the Presentation Sisters in Berkeley, and then two more in Santa Barbara. Having applied for admission to the Presentation community, she traveled back to Milwaukee to say goodbye to her family. But her pastor at Saints Peter

parents and the seven siblings who would eventually follow, she would for the rest of her life be simply Liz.



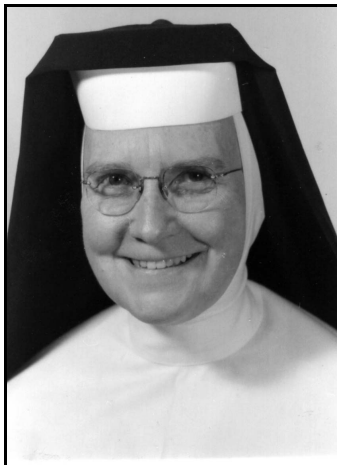
High school graduation



California nurse, 1939



Reception Day, 1941



About 1960



1947

and Paul persuaded her to look for a way to serve God closer to home. "Shopping around" for another community, she stopped at Saint Benedict the Moor, where Sister Amata Verboomen arranged to take her to Racine the very next day (via the MRK — the Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha train) for a visit. There, after a tour of the Racine Dominican motherhouse on Park Avenue, Mother Romana Thom told young Liz, "You can begin to teach tomorrow!" "But Mother," said an astonished Liz, "I must return to work and earn a dowry!" So back to Santa Barbara she went, worked for six months, and returned one snowy January day in 1941 to enter Saint Catherine's Convent as a postulant. At twenty-nine, she was by far the oldest in her class (but would outlive them all). In the next six months, she would say later, she "acquired a year of college by osmosis."

That summer, on August 4, she received the Dominican habit and the name Sister Mary Sheila of Saint Dominic. During her senior novitiate year she trekked the few blocks to Holy Name School each weekday to begin a teaching ministry which would span nearly four decades.

After celebrating her first profession of vows on August 4, 1943, she was assigned to Saint Luke's in Plain, Wisconsin, but two years later was back in Racine, this time at Saint Rita's, to serve for five years. The fall term of 1950 found her at Holy Cross School in Kaukauna. In 1952 she was transferred to Saint Louis in Caledonia, and the following year to Saint Norbert's in Roxbury. A year at Saint Mary's in Janesville followed, and then five years back at her first mission, Holy Name in Racine.

Meanwhile, she like many Racine Dominicans had been spending her summers at Saint Norbert College in DePere, and in 1957 was awarded her undergraduate degree in history.





1967



About 1975

Sheila's students, from primary to upper grades, deeply loved and respected her. Many would visit her and otherwise keep in touch over the decades. She cherished their letters and reciprocated with notes and letters of her own — always neatly typed. Many would keep and treasure those notes. For Mother's Day in 2012, she received a card from one of her Kaukauna

In 1960 Sister Sheila moved to Saint Mary's in Belgium, Wisconsin. The following year found her at Saint John's in South Milwaukee, and after two years there, back in Kaukauna for a year. 1964 brought her first and only assignment to Michigan, to Saint Clement's in Center Line, but she had been there only a semester when she was called back to Racine to teach at Saint Patrick's. In 1968 she moved north to South Milwaukee for a second time. She began the following school year at Saint Nicholas School in Milwaukee, but after just a month there moved to finish the term at Saint Andrew's in Knowles. A third one-year ministry in Kaukauna followed.

About this time, Racine Dominicans abandoned their assignment system and sisters began to discern and choose their own places of ministry. In 1971 Sister Sheila began a three-year ministry at Saint Mathias School in Milwaukee. Next came a year at Saint Aloysius in West Allis, then three years at Saint John Nepomuc in Milwaukee, and two years at Saint Barbara's in Milwaukee.

In 1980, Sheila accepted a position once more at Holy Cross in Kaukauna. There she would remain until Providence brought a different turn to her life.



Helpers S. Ada Marie Harner and Sheila Ehr  
with S. Rosella Smith, 1985



seventh graders, who wrote, “Happy Mother’s Day to you who have mothered so many of us.”

In 1981, a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis forced sixty-eight-year-old Sheila to leave the classroom and move to Siena Center. Initially she was devastated. True to her spirit, however, “months of anxiety, uncertainty, hopeless hours and dependence [gave] way to new-found faith and trust in God, resignation and the opportunity to serve Christ in His suffering and aging members.”



1990



At the keyboard with the Jubilers, 1997

And serve she did until her very last days. Even as her physical limitations increased, Sheila remained tirelessly dedicated to the Senior Companion Program. Even though she couldn’t visit them physically, every month she caringly typed encouraging notes on her old electric typewriter to eighteen homebound people. The same love and concern she put into each letter to a former student was also given to corresponding with her senior companions. “I make each letter a special, personal message,” she explained when interviewed in 2010. “Even if it takes a long time, it’s worth it.” In addition, she regularly wrote notes to the sisters at Lakeshore Manor and, of course, continued to encourage and share life with former students through her trusty typewriter.

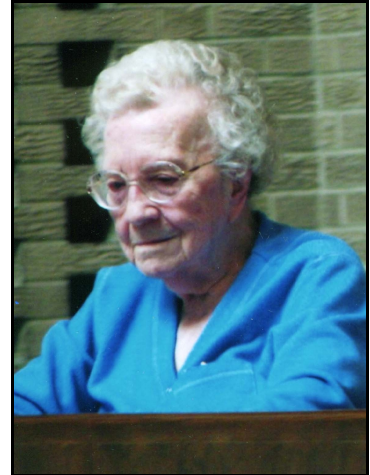


Walking, walking, walking!

Beyond her skills as a teacher, Sheila was also a good cook, and had often become *de facto* “food service director” (as she put it) in mission houses without an “official” cook.

But Sheila’s “special delights,” she once wrote, were Scripture study, outdoor communion with nature, solitude, classical music, opera, walking, and other physical exercise. She loved quiet and solitude, and so her daily walks — at first unaided, then with a walker, and finally “peddling” her wheelchair — were a treasured time for communing with nature and with God. When she couldn’t walk, she used an exercise bike, often for half an hour at a time, a practice she kept up until less than two weeks before her death.

She shared her love of music by serving as organist in many of her places of ministry, and later by playing recorder and keyboard in Siena Center’s orchestra, the Jubilers.



At prayer



Even the most personal notes always typed!

Neatness might have been Sheila’s middle name! In the 1960s she would spend time in the summer helping out at Our Lady of the Oaks in Pewaukee. One day she asked Sister Vivian Giddings how often the sisters’ gravestones in the cemetery were cleaned. The response didn’t please her, and soon she and Vivian were out scrubbing stones — letter by engraved letter!

She was an avid reader, and would “peddle” from her room, down the elevator, along the corridors to the next wing, and up another elevator when she came across something especially

good, to share with her close friend Sister Esther Szambelan.

Sheila was a woman of twinkling eyes, gentle smile, and soft speech. But though she loved quiet and solitude, she was always ready for a good laugh. She dearly loved her family and was, as her youngest and only surviving brother Thomas said at her funeral, “so good to all our family,” always “very present to everyone.”

As June turned to July in 2012, Sheila was hospitalized with pneumonia. As her condition worsened, she entered Hospice and was simply kept as comfortable as possible. But when one of her nieces came to visit, Sheila, though heavily sedated, struggled to stay awake for her. Still in the hospital, she died very peacefully about 5:00 on the morning of July 10. She was ninety-nine years old.

Her funeral liturgy was celebrated on Friday afternoon, July 13. She had requested that her body be cremated, and the following Monday her cremains were interred in the community plot at Holy Cross Cemetery in Caledonia.