

Sister Ione (Francis Marie) Forga, OP
Born to earthly life: October 26, 1912
Religious profession: August 4, 1931
Entered eternal life: February 8, 2012

*And we who with unveiled faces
contemplate the Lord's glory
are being transformed into God's image
with ever-increasing glory.*

2 Corinthians 3:17-18



Ione Eunice, born on October 26, 1912, in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, was the second of Frank and Elizabeth Ryan Forga's three children. Her family lived in several Wisconsin cities during her childhood years as her Dad, a carpenter and designer, sought work.



Baby Ione

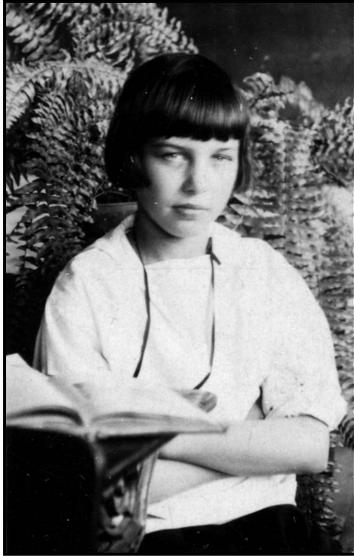
Her brother Floyd, her elder by just a year, was her constant companion. Dismayed to be left home when Floyd started school, little Ione would scamper across the street at every opportunity to sneak quietly into her brother's classroom. "Seeing me coming, he would push over in his seat and I would slip in beside him, assuming my perfect right to be there," she recalled. Finally Floyd's teacher suggested that Mrs. Forga properly enroll her daughter, "since I was in school half the time anyway. So at a tender age, I started school," said Ione, "and my brother and I traveled the same scholastic road."

She was an independent spirit from the start! Once, when she was just four, she eluded her mother's eye and proceeded to make her uncertain way uptown, "crossing streets, oblivious to danger." She stopped at a jewelry store window, dazzled by the "marvelous array of colored beads." The store owner, seeing no adult with the child, brought her inside and set her prominently in the display window until a frantic search party of neighbors and friends finally discovered her, "still admiring the beads."

Ione had attended parochial schools before her family's move to Milwaukee when she was in fifth grade, but sitting in Holy



Ione (left) with her siblings



Ione at fifteen



The young postulant, 1929

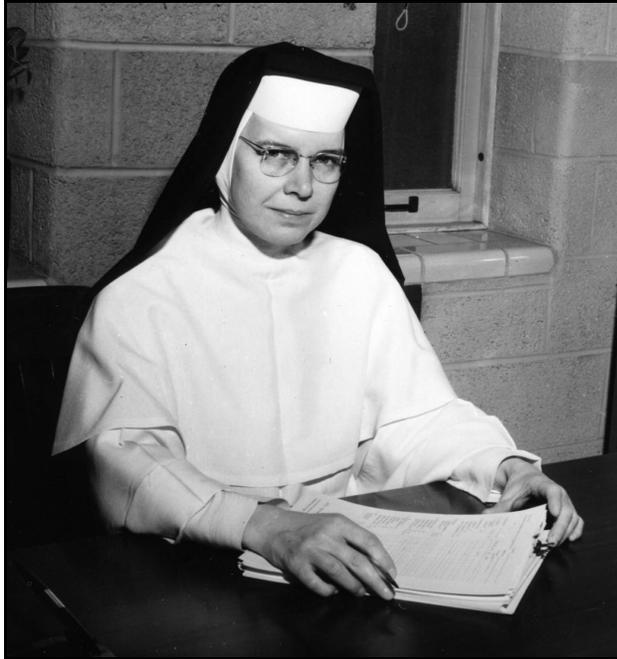
Angels Church on Christmas Eve she and her family saw sisters in white habits for the very first time. Her mother thought surely they were wearing aprons because sisters *always* dressed in black! They had discovered Racine Dominicans. And in sixth grade Ione discovered Sister Redempta Kohler. She was kind and understanding, and after Ione had attended three Reception ceremonies in Racine as Sister Redempta's guest, she asked her parents if she could join the



With her siblings, about 1935



About 1935



At Nativity High School

community. Her mother said she was too young, but when Ione persisted, her father said, “Oh, let her go. She’ll be home in a month!” She entered the postulate on August 15, 1928, not quite sixteen years old. On August 4, 1929, she received the Dominican habit and the name Sister Francis Marie of the Poverty of Jesus.

It was probably her extreme youth and the fact that she hadn’t yet finished high school that kept the novice from being sent out to teach during the second year of her novitiate. But right after her first profession of vows on August 4, 1931, not quite nineteen years old, she began her teaching ministry as Saint Patrick’s in Racine.

A year later she was assigned to Assumption Grotto in Detroit, where she taught for five years. She was delighted after that to be

transferred to Saint Benedict the Moor School in Milwaukee, even if only for a term. In 1938 she moved across town to Holy Angels, where she had spent the last four of her elementary school years. Six years at Saint John’s in Hubbardston, Michigan, followed.

Meanwhile, like so many Racine Dominicans, she had been completing summer after summer of college courses at Saint Norbert’s College in DePere, Wisconsin. There, in the summer of 1941, she received her degree in English, with a minor in Latin.

From 1946 until 1952, Sister Francis Marie taught at Saint Mary’s in Mineral Point, now spending her summers at DePaul University in Chicago, where in 1952 she attained her master’s degree.

She spent the 1952–1953 term at Saint John’s High School in Little Chute, and then was assigned as local superior and high school principal at Nativity in Detroit. From 1959 until 1962 she taught at Saint Catherine’s High School in Racine. During a difficult period there, she found a good outlet sitting in on Sister Rosaria Novak’s Spanish class.

Our Lady of Guadalupe School in Santa Fe next claimed two years of her service. There she had a golden opportunity — to speak Spanish with those for whom it was a first language. This language skill would serve her well in her ministries for the rest of her life. She loved the language, and she loved speaking it.



1967



At work in Milwaukee's Religious Education Office

In 1964 she moved north again, this time to Saint Clement's in Center Line, Michigan, for four years. In 1968 she was recruited to teach at Dominican College. (She had that year returned to the use of her baptismal name, Ione.) Then, in 1970, she went to the Fox River Valley, teaching first for a year in Little Chute and then for two at Holy Cross in Kaukauna.

In 1973, at the age of sixty-one, she began an eight-year term as secretary in the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education. Next she filled the same role for a year at

Sacred Heart Seminary in Hales Corners.

She was seventy years old when she moved to Siena Center in 1982 and lent her skills to tutoring adults in reading English as a second language and teaching other sisters Spanish. A lover of



Tutoring at Siena Center



70th Jubilee, 2001

music, she also joined the Jubilars, Siena Center's small orchestra, playing violin.

As Ione's health began to fail and she needed more care than could be provided at Siena Center, she moved in late 2006 to Lakeshore Manor. Her final months were filled with pain, but she finally died peacefully on February 8, 2012, at the age of



The Jubilers Strings:
Sister Esther Szambelan, Dorothy Ann Greiber, Ione Forga, Joyce Quintana, Marietta Bertelsen



Working hard at therapy, 2006

ninety-nine. She had been a devoted Racine Dominican for eighty years. “I never thought of leaving, even during the tough times,” she had said resolutely at the time of her seventy-fifth jubilee. “A woman who held her head high and walked with great dignity, she presented herself as one being in charge, whether of a school, a mission convent of sisters, or a classroom,” said Sister Sharon Simon at her funeral. “She was very resourceful in finding her way.”

Central to Ione’s life was the Dominican contemplative spirit. In the 1950s, before it was “in vogue,” she was teaching anyone who would listen the way she had devised for herself of

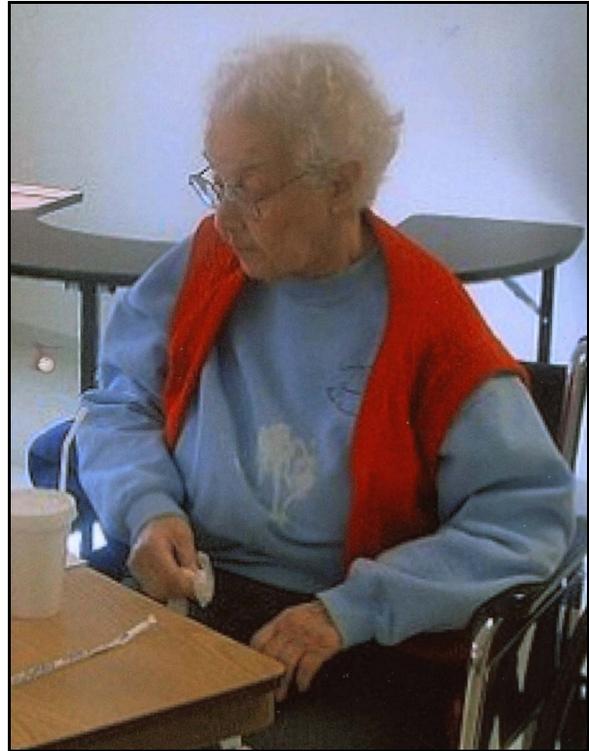
meditating on the scriptures line by line. And even in her later years she continued her quest into “knowing what contemplation really is.”

Another of her passions was community participation in chapters and assemblies. For some twenty years she served with committees which would eventually develop the all-community assembly/chapter structure which finally came to fruition in June of 1984. “She felt boundless gratitude and exclaimed it as a highlight of her life in community,” said Sister Sharon Simon. “She has said of herself that she achieved no particular success at anything she did and, with a bit of amusement, described her life as having ‘reached a perfection of mediocrity.’”

For nearly a hundred years this woman of faith was sustained by the “good news of salvation,”

said Sister Jean Verber in her funeral homily. “Ione believed in God’s promise and learned to live into that promise.” Among her siblings, she had lived the longest; both her sister and brother had died in their early fifties.

Ione’s body rests in the community plot in Holy Cross Cemetery in Caledonia.



About 2009