

**Sister Marie Imelda Baumgartner, OP**  
**Born to earthly life: December 20, 1922**  
**Religious profession: August 4, 1942**  
**Entered eternal life: May 10, 2016**

**“Whatever you did for the least  
of these brothers and sisters of mine,  
you did for me.”**

**Matthew 25, 40**



**About 2010**



**Marcella, 1924**



**First Communion**

Marcella Grace, the fifth of Lawrence and Hedwig (Hatti) Beier Baumgartner’s ten children, was welcomed into life by her parents, two brothers, and two sisters on their farm in Warren, Michigan, on December 20, 1922. Living through the hard years of the depression, she learned hard work and discipline early.

Marcella would credit her mother for rooting her in a deep faith and in prayer. She had, she wrote later, decided during her early years of school that she wanted to be a Dominican sister — just like her older sister Margaret, who had made profession as Sister John Dominic in 1934. So on August 30, 1937, two months after finishing eighth grade, she took “the big and courageous step” of leaving home to attend Saint Catherine’s High School in Racine, Wisconsin, more than four hundred miles from her family.



**Marcella with her twin sisters, June 6, 1937**

At her reception into the novitiate in the summer of 1940, Marcella was given the name Sister Marie Imelda of the Blessed Sacrament. She pronounced her first vows on August 4, 1942.



1937

After more than thirty years of instructing elementary school children, she found a distinct pleasure in working with adults. So during her seven years in South Milwaukee, she devoted a large portion of her free time to visiting the sick, the elderly, and shut-ins. Then, as she ministered to her parents in their last years, she knew in her heart that this was what she was called to

That fall, while still attending classes herself, she began her teaching ministry at Saint Rita's in Racine. Five years later she was transferred to Saint Mary's in Janesville for a year. The 1948 term found her at Nativity Elementary School in Detroit, where she served for four years. After this, she taught at Holy Name in Racine (1952 to 1955); and Saint Andrew's in Knowles, Wisconsin (1955 to 1958). Meanwhile, she was spending most of her summers at Saint Norbert College in DePere, where she received her baccalaureate degree in English in 1958.



As a bride on Reception Day



Reception Day, 1940

Teaching assignments followed at Holy Cross in Kaukauna (1958 to 1959); Saint Mary's in Kenosha (1959 to 1960); Saint John's in South Milwaukee (1960 to 1962); Sacred Heart in Racine (1962 to 1964); Saint Rose in Racine (1964 to 1965); Saint Clement's in Center Line, Michigan (1965 to 1971); and again Saint John's in South Milwaukee (1971 to 1978).



1946

do, and decided to go into pastoral care ministry. In speaking of those years, during which so much was changing in the church and religious life, she said, "This time was truly a breath of fresh air and a real life-saver for me. I wholeheartedly welcomed the changes that came in so many areas of our life. I greatly appreciate the encouragement my community offered for continuing education and religious

development. I will never be able to express how grateful I am that my sisters took renewal so seriously, providing me and others many beautiful opportunities to dialogue about both change and the ministry to which we felt called."

Though she enjoyed teaching, once the possibility opened up for Racine Dominicans to choose their own ministries, she began to pursue studies in clinical pastoral education (CPE) at Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia. Once certified, she served as chaplain at Saint Mary's Medical Center in Racine from



1968

1980 until September of 1986. Then, at the age of sixty-four, she began to volunteer in the Hospice program at Racine's Saint Luke's Hospital. Part

of 1989 was spent as pastoral associate at Saint John's Parish in South Milwaukee, after which she assumed a chaplaincy position at Saint Catherine's Hospital in Kenosha, where she ministered until October of 1999. The following March, she became a volunteer chaplain at Aurora Medical Center in Kenosha and served there until her retirement at the end of September, 2005.

She was very compassionate and caring in her dealings with patients and their family members. She especially enjoyed teaching the student nurses at Gateway about the spiritual care of patients and their families. One of her former associates said she had once



About 1948

come across the definition of a nun as “a little lady wrapped up in God.” Further she said, “Those of us who have worked with Sister Marie Imelda in her ministry of healing, say that definition fits her to a *t*.”

Testimonies of Marie Imelda’s outreach to others abounded — especially stories about her compassion for people suffering the trauma of caring for and losing a loved one.

“I think she found her deep love in the second half of her ministry,” Sister Jean Ackerman would comment at Marie Imelda’s funeral. Sister Jean remembered a staff member at Saint Catherine’s Hospital in Kenosha asking, “Do you know how this woman has touched hundreds and hundreds of people, including staff?”



**The chaplain in action**



**Scrabble with S. Rita VanderVelden**

Another of the many stories shared came from Nick, whose father had been a patient at Saint Catherine’s. “She was unbelievably supportive of my family through my father’s illness and death. Ten years after he died, I encountered



**The joy of her life**



With Sister Margaret

Sister Marie Imelda again when I was in medical training, and I learned much from her. She was so supportive of staff in our dealings with patients.”

Associate Marilyn Lauer, who succeeded Marie Imelda as chaplain at Aurora Hospital in Kenosha, expressed gratitude for the lessons her predecessor taught about love and compassion for people. “She brought the spirit of the old Saint Catherine’s Hospital to Aurora,” Marilyn said. The Lauer family had experienced Marie Imelda’s pastoral care personally when their young adult



The Baumgartner Family

daughter Emily was taken by cancer.

Chuck, a staff member at Saint Catherine's until it closed and who then worked at Aurora, recalled, "Sister Marie Imelda was a rock for all of us. She came with the staff to Aurora, and it was a blessing to have her there, both personally and professionally."

On December 20, 2008, Marie Imelda suffered the loss of her Racine Dominican sister, Sister Margaret. Several years later, even as her own body weakened and her memory failed, Marie Imelda's primary concern remained that of "doing for others" whenever she could. On the night of May 9, 2016, when death seemed imminent, several members of the community and director of nursing services Pam Hudson visited her at Kenosha Estates Living and Care Center to pray with her, anoint her, and sing the *Salve*. She died peacefully in the early morning of May 10. She is survived by two sisters, Mary and Imelda, as well as the families of her siblings.

Her funeral liturgy was celebrated at Siena Center on May 16, after which her body was interred in the community plot at Holy Cross Cemetery in Caledonia.