



2015

Sister Emeline Bash, OP
Born to earthly life: August 9, 1916
Religious profession: August 4, 1935
Entered eternal life: October 2, 2016

*I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.*

2 Tim. 4,8

On August 9, 1916, John and Mary Gough Bash of Toronto, Canada, welcomed a daughter, the first of their eventual seven children, whom they named Mary Helen. Her aunt would later often tell her that she had been “just a handful,” and was sometimes laid in a work basket to sleep. Because she was so small, not much was asked of her by way of household tasks.

She was, she said “a regular tomboy,” and often regretted that she was not actually a boy, envying the boys “their games, their pranks, and above all, their daring courage.”

Mary Helen started school at Loretto Abbey in Toronto at the age of five. She later vividly recalled the spanking she received there for hitting the youngsters who sat near her over the head with her ruler. But at the end of the first semester, she contracted pneumonia and had to spend several months in bed.

Mr. Bash was a United States citizen, and in the fall of 1921 was offered a job in Warren, Michigan. So the family moved to Detroit, where they became members of the Polish Parish of Saint Thomas. Only a few weeks later, Mrs. Bash took ill. When she entered the hospital, Mary Helen was sent to live with an aunt; it was a time Mary Helen would later remember as the most miserable she ever spent. In September of 1922, she began first grade at Saint Thomas School, where she was taught by Polish sisters and had to learn to speak and pray in Polish. Distressed at this turn of events, her mother had her transferred to Saint Anthony’s. Mary Helen would forever be grateful for the lessons of faith and prayer the School Sisters of Notre Dame there taught her.

As the family grew larger, Mrs. Bash urged her husband to move out of the city to the fresher air of the village of Center Line. At first, Mary Helen dreaded having “the white sisters” as teachers; but by the time she reached sixth grade she was actually feeling a desire to be one of them, having been particularly won over by Sister Elaine Hegeman (1897–1974), “who was always so neat and clean and was an excellent teacher.” It was a desire she tried hard to quench, not wanting to give up home and family and good times with her friends. Finally, in her first year of high school, she confided in one of her teachers and made a three-day retreat which confirmed her conviction that she was called to religious life. Though her mother acquiesced immediately, her father was not so easily persuaded. He eventually gave his consent, however, and on August 3, 1932, Mary Helen left for Racine to become a postulant.

After a first night of intense homesickness, she spent “one of the happiest years” of her convent life, and was received into the novitiate on August 4, 1933, as Sister M. Emeline of the Holy Angels.

As a senior novice she was sent to teach second and third grades at Saint Joseph’s School across the Root River. For a few months she was thrilled with her new ministry; but by Christmas she found herself “positively hating” it — a feeling that finally began to ease after her profession and give way to love.

She pronounced her first vows on August 4, 1935, after which she continued her ministry at Saint Joseph’s until 1947. Meanwhile, she spent her summers – except for the summer of 1941, which she spent at the motherhouse preparing for her final profession, celebrated on August 5 – pursuing her baccalaureate degree in education first at the community’s Saint Albertus Junior College (later Dominican) and then during summers at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, graduating in 1953.

Subsequent summers were spent at Catholic University in Washington, DC, where she was awarded her master’s degree in English in 1961.

In the fall of 1947 she was missioned to Assumption Grotto in Detroit. Then, after a year’s rest at the motherhouse, she ministered at Racine’s Holy Name School for three years before returning to the Grotto in 1952. The 1955–1956 term found her at Saint Benedict the Moor in Milwaukee, after which she spent four years at Holy Cross in Kaukauna, Wisconsin.

By this time, Sister Emeline’s teaching skills were evident, and in 1960 she was appointed assistant supervisor for the community’s schools in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. In 1961 she became a teaching principal at Saint Clement’s in Center Line, Michigan, serving also as community assistant supervisor for Michigan. The latter role was expanded the next year to include Michigan, Illinois, and New Mexico. In 1964 she became supervisor of schools for Detroit, and in December of 1968, assistant superintendent of Catholic Schools and regional consultant for the Education Department of the Archdiocese of Detroit. In



1966

January of 1972, she accepted a position as superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Kalamazoo, and then, in 1974, as director of student development and dean of students at Madonna College in Livonia, Michigan. Of her work there she said, “I am in a position which allows me to aid students to meet personal, academic and career challenges. The obstacles are many but so are the rewards. As students’ clear obstacles, I share their joy.... And I share also their feeling of accomplishment as I too discover new capacities for coping with the



Sister Emeline was among the first sisters to get a driver’s license in the 1960s.

challenges of my own life.”

Sister Emeline was, said Sister Alice Pittz at her Remembering Service, an educator “from the top of her head to the tip of her toes.” Alice herself recalled her own dismay as she compared her performance to the “Gestapo manner” of the teacher across the hall from her classroom on her first mission. Emeline’s simple advice as her principal was, “Why don’t you just teach the way you know how to teach?” And once again the sun began to rise! When Sister Therese Van Thull from little Kimberly, Wisconsin, was beginning her first principalship in Center Line, Emeline phoned her every evening to check on how things were going and to offer her assistance.



1990



Never at a loss for words!

Sister Kathleen Bohn, Emeline’s student in fifth, sixth, and seventh grades at Saint Joseph’s in Racine, remembered her teacher’s skills in English grammar, particularly in diagramming complex sentences.

In 1987, at the age of seventy-one, she decided to move into a less demanding schedule and became pastoral associate at Saint Joseph’s Parish in Lake Orion, Michigan. Two years later she moved to Saint Christopher’s Parish in Marysville, Michigan, as director of adult education. Scaling back her schedule even more in 1991, she returned to Saint Clement’s to volunteer in the parish RCIA program.



70th Jubilee, 2005



2015

She was eighty-nine when she retired to Siena Center in 2005, telling the people of Center Line: “I know and I feel that I need to get back to community living, praying and enjoying our community life, and in what better place can this be done than at Siena Center, our lovely home on Lake Michigan?” At Siena she filled her time with reading, correspondence with students, participating in house events and meetings and occasionally participating in retreats. She loved visiting with sisters, visitors (including former students), and staff, reveling in telling and retelling stories from her years of ministry. She could always be counted on to raise her voice in question or comment during community meetings or when a presider would invite a post-liturgical exchange.

Emeline remained an active force in the community until confusion began to set in and concern for her safety grew.

On June 21 she moved to Lakeshore Manor.

By late September, Emeline was spending increasing amounts of time in bed and eating very little. On October 2, 2016, her condition declined quite rapidly. She became unresponsive, was placed on oxygen and kept as comfortable as possible. Sisters had planned to gather in her room to sing the *Salve Regina* the next day, but that evening, a little before ten o'clock, Emeline died peacefully at the age of one hundred. Penny Sorenson, nurse at Lakeshore and Racine Dominican Associate, was with her.

Sister Emeline's parents, all of her sisters – Patricia, Theresa, Sister Ruth, Esther, and Imelda – and her brother Thomas had all gone before her. She was survived by a number of nieces and nephews.

Her funeral was celebrated on Friday, October 7. Father Steve Varghese, SAC, presided, and Sister Ruthanne Reed preached the homily. At Sister Emeline's request, her body was cremated, and her ashes buried the following Wednesday in the community plot in Holy Cross Cemetery in Caledonia.