



Sister Agnes (M. Magdala) Ballweg, OP
Born to earthly life: June 15, 1925
Religious profession: August 4, 1944
Entered eternal life: November 24, 2016

*“We learn to wait for God’s gift of transformation.
God loves us just as we are.”*

S. Agnes Ballweg

Agnes Adeline Ballweg was born on June 15, 1925, the sixth child of Magdalena Roelke and Jacob Ballweg of Roxbury, Wisconsin. There, at Saint Norbert Parish, she was baptized.

Agnes would later speak of her childhood with delight. During her primary school days she was taken to school at Saint Norbert’s by her older brother. But after he graduated when she was in fourth grade, Agnes had to board with her Racine Dominican teachers during the week with thirteen other students because daily chores made it impossible for her parents to take her. Agnes often wondered about the strange times the young boarders were encouraged to play, but finally figured out that it coincided with the sisters’ prayer times. Once in fifth grade, she was able to take the school bus — the first to be picked up very early in the morning and the last one to be dropped off at home in the evening.

Agnes was in sixth grade when her mother died suddenly of a massive stroke. She recalled her father’s tenderness as he shielded the three youngest girls from the brutal cold at the graveside on the day of her funeral and then sent them to the car for warmth.

Agnes came to Racine as an aspirant after graduating from eighth grade. That was August 30, 1939, and she was just fourteen. Three years later, as a postulant, she was assigned to assist the sacristan, Sister Ottilia Behnke. One day she provided her classmates a bit of amusement when, out of force of habit, she made a profound bow and genuflected as she entered the refectory late for breakfast!

On August 4, 1942, she received the Dominican habit and the name Sister M. Magdala of the Love of Jesus.

During the second year of her novitiate she was sent to teach at Saint Rita’s on the far north side of Racine. She and several other sisters would take a bus from the motherhouse to the end of the line at Gould Street and walk the remaining two-plus miles to school, quite a hike twice daily through all kinds of weather!



Agnes as an aspirant, 1940



Saint Mary's, Pewaukee, 1959



About 1960

After the celebration of her first profession on August 4, 1944, Sister Magdala was assigned to Holy Angels in Milwaukee, where she taught for four years. Two terms at Saints Peter and Paul in Green Bay followed. During the summers she continued her studies in education at Dominican College, except for 1950, when she spent the summer preparing for her final vows, celebrated on August 15. She would be awarded her baccalaureate degree in 1960.

Her next assignments were at Detroit's Nativity Elementary School (1950 to 1952); Saint Mary's in Belgium, Wisconsin (1952 to 1955); Saint Andrew's in Knowles, Wisconsin (1955 to 1958); and Saint Mary's in Pewaukee

(1958 to 1962). Sister Yvonne Renner would later recall trips to Belgium to help Magdala with her music classes and choir, for which the latter was most grateful, since she had a hard time playing the organ with her left hand and so found choir practice "torture." "I could play better," she teased, "if I weren't so short!"



About 1975



With S. Clara Dischler in Ketchikan



1990

There, as she convalesced, she assisted in the library. By January of 1995 she was ready to move on, and took up service as a community volunteer in Eau Claire with her niece, Sister Joyce Ballweg, as “companion, friend, sister, auntie.” Then, in October of 1998, at the age of seventy-three, she began volunteer ministry back in Racine, living with Joyce first on the north side and then in the convent at Saint Louis in Caledonia. She moved to Siena Center in January of 2014. In spite of her pain, she radiated a smiling joy and an innate graciousness that enabled her to create a sense of community among diverse personalities. She loved a good card game, and her candy and

From 1962 to 1968 she served as principal and local superior at Saint Peter’s School in East Troy, Wisconsin. At the end of that assignment, she resumed her baptismal name as she began a new term at Saint Mary’s in Mineral Point. 1969 found her once again appointed principal and local superior, this time at Saint Sebastian’s in Sturtevant. When Racine Dominicans began to choose their own ministries and places of residence the next year, Agnes opted to stay in Sturtevant. She moved to Saint Mary’s in Kansasville in 1975, and a year later to Holy Cross in Kaukauna. In 1977 she assumed the principalship at Saint Louis in Caledonia.

In 1982, she accepted an invitation from Sisters Rita VanderVelden and Clara Dischler to minister with them and several sisters of other congregations in the only Catholic school in the Diocese of Juneau, Alaska, Holy Name in Ketchikan. Agnes served first as school secretary and then as sixth-grade teacher. She loved her time there, reveling in Juneau’s pristine beauty, its sunrises and sunsets with eagles soaring, and the whales which could be seen from her classroom during their yearly migrations.

Health issues dictated a move back to Racine and to Siena Center in December of 1991.



Cleopatra at Halloween, 2016

dessert creations became reasons for sisters to gather around a table to share the stories of daily life. In those simple encounters, relationships deepened and community bonds were forged more deeply. Just a month before her death, she showed up as a dazzling Cleopatra in the pre-Halloween costume parade — and took first prize!



Jubilee, 2014



The Big One!

Then suddenly, on the night of October 26, she was taken to the emergency room at All

Saints Hospital because of low blood pressure and was admitted to the intensive care unit with internal bleeding. That eventually stopped, and she was moved into the cardiovascular unit. She was discharged a few days later, but was readmitted on November 14 for treatment of recurring symptoms. Though her condition seemed to improve over the next days, by November 20 her doctors judged that nothing further could be done to

reverse her congestive heart issues and kidney failure, and she was placed in Hospice Care at the hospital. Sisters gathered in the Siena Center chapel on Tuesday morning, November 22, to sing the *Salve Regina*. On Thanksgiving morning, November 24, Sisters Joyce Ballweg, Margaret Hild, and Karen Vollmer had just finished praying the Dominican Blessing at Agnes' bedside when she went home to God very peacefully and beautifully.

Agnes' funeral was celebrated at Siena Center on Wednesday, November 30, 2016. Family had always been precious for her, and in the Remembering Service, her nieces and nephews recounted story after story of their "Auntie Aggie," of her playful and non-judgmental spirit. "She'll be baking Christmas cookies in heaven!" commented Sister Agnes Johnson.

Father Jerome Maksvytis of the Diocese of Madison, a family friend, presided and preached at the liturgy. Interment at Caledonia's Holy Cross Cemetery followed after dinner.

Sister Agnes was survived by classmates Sisters Rita Martin and Valerie Zielinski as well as many nieces and nephews, grandnieces and nephews, great-grandnieces and nephews, and one great-great-grandnephew. Her parents as well as her brothers Robert and Erwin, and her sisters Alice, Florence, Loraine, Esther, and Mabel had preceded her into eternity.



With S. Joyce, Golden Jubilee, 1994