

Sister M. Brenda (Brendan) Walsh, OP
Born to earthly life: July 2, 1932
Religious profession: August 15, 1961
Entered eternal life: June 10, 2018

No doubt about it!
God rules! Always has! Always will!
End of discussion!

[Brenda, inspired by Ps. 66:7; Ps. 145:13; Rev. 1:18]



Delia Agnes Walsh, daughter of Mary Brady and James Walsh, was born on July 2, 1932,¹ in Danganmore, County Mayo, Ireland,² and baptized at Saint Joseph Parish there. She was the fourth of five children and had two brothers and two sisters. All of her family had a very deep and strong faith and Brenda, like her father, regularly devoted time to contemplation and prayer. Her family taught her to be sensitive to the needs of others and instilled in her a desire to give of herself in service. She also learned responsibility and cooperation — for no one’s work was finished until everyone’s work was finished. And she learned the importance of sharing, as the family shared the little they had with anyone who had less than they did.

After high school graduation Delia worked in England for two years. But even as a girl Delia had felt called to a contemplative life, and that call had grown stronger during her high school years. So she emigrated to the United States and joined a cloistered Carmelite community in Brooklyn. Eighteen months later, however, she became ill and left; but her desire to be part of a contemplative community remained.

In the 1950s, while living with an aunt and uncle in Chicago, she met some Racine Dominicans, a number of whom were at that time attending summer school in the city or providing domestic services to the Dominican friars at River Forest. They invited her to Racine and she knew she had found her community, one that combined prayer, contemplation, and action. She became a postulant on September 7, 1958, and the following summer, on August 17, received the Dominican habit and the name Sister M. Brendan (later adapted to Brenda) of the Holy Spirit. She celebrated her first profession on August 15, 1961, and then, with her classmates, stayed on at the motherhouse in the “juniorate” program to complete her college education, awarded a bachelor’s degree in English in 1963. Over ensuing summers she would by 1972 earn a master’s degree in theology and religious studies at Manhattan College in New York.

1. Brenda’s actual birth date is July 2, 1932. In Ireland the day that someone goes to town and registers the birth is the “official” date of birth. Her “official” day of birth is August 2, 1932, and this is the date Brenda used for all her documents — U.S. Citizenship, Social Security, driver’s license, etc.

2. Brenda’s Racine Dominican record gives her birth place as County Mayo.



Sister Brendan with relatives on Reception Day, 1959

Assignments followed, first in classroom teaching and then in religious education, at Detroit's Assumption Grotto (1963 to 1964); Saint Benedict the Moor in Milwaukee (1964 to 1965); Saint Charles in Burlington (1965 to 1967); Holy Cross in Kaukauna (1967 to 1968); Saint Edward's in Racine (1968 to 1971); and Saint Mary's in Racine (1971 to 1975).

Over the years, she managed regular trips back to Ireland. On one of these, her little nieces took her on a walk along ocean. "You have to always talk to us in Gaelic while you're here," they admonished her, "so you won't forget it." She never did forget, as a help often taking meeting notes in Gaelic.

Brenda's visionary leadership abilities were apparent even in her early ministries. She often quoted T. S. Eliot: "Do I dare, do we

dare, disturb the universe?" She *did* disturb the universe on a regular basis, and detractors found her a force to be reckoned with!

In 1975, when the chapter decided to expand the executive committee to include three vice presidents, Brenda was elected to fill the new position, which she held until 1982. Next came her



**The executive committee, 1976:
Sisters Rosaire Lucassen, Brenda Walsh, Jean Verber**

tenure as director of the congregation's Senior Companion Program. A conference to address issues resulting from Racine's poor economy grew under her leadership into an organization far beyond the 1980s and 1990s into *Racine 2000 and Beyond*. Out of these movements came the Conflict Resolution Center, Racine Mutual Housing, and Neighborhood Watch. Brenda was instrumental also in starting the Health Care Network and connected with pastors and community leaders to address violence and create a culture of peace. Brenda saw needs, persisted, and found ways

to make things happen to meet those needs. If people wanted to get something done, they called Brenda. The fledgling Health Care Network, for example, brought medical access to families who could afford none and in its first three decades has scheduled more than 206,000 medical and dental appointments and dispensed over 88,000 prescriptions for people without health care coverage.



Brenda in Thailand

Brenda was also a chaplain, gifted writer, commentator, poet, and preacher. Her numerous articles, many on peace and justice, brought responses from around the world. She wrote regularly for “Parson to Person” in the *Racine Journal Times* and challenged readers by giving a moral perspective on poverty, homelessness, and war. Like Dominic, she built bridges and engaged with people from Thailand to India and many places in between. She connected with the soul/spirit of all those she met and never judged by appearances. She didn’t like being in the spotlight but would start a project, then spin it off to others to run. Her hope and faith remained strong throughout her life — for she knew God always gave her the strength to deal with any challenges and

that God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.

The knitted figures she created in her spare moments — playful monkeys and an expansive Nativity scene — delighted all who received them.

In spite of her prodigious energy, Brenda eventually



Brenda with her Senior Companion visitors



Meeting with Racine clergy

found herself in need of the care she had lavished on so many. On August 16, 2014, she took up residence at Lakeshore Manor, maintaining her contacts from there as she could. In early June of 2018 she was admitted to All Saints Hospital, but returned to Lakeshore Manor just a few days later, discontinuing all treatment except for comfort measures. Her dear friend Sister Mary Ann Pevas stayed with her through the night of

Saturday, June 9, until Brenda very peacefully breathed her last about 4:15 Sunday morning.

Brenda was survived by one living sister, Cait, the latter's husband Arni, and their children, all in Ireland, and by her classmates, Sisters Dolores Catanach, Germaine Heitpas, Mary Ann Pevas, and Carol Wester and all of her Racine Dominican sisters and associates.

Her funeral liturgy was celebrated at Siena Center on Wednesday morning, June 13, with Father Dick Molter presiding and Sister Mary Ann Pevas preaching. Sister Kathy Slesar set the celebration in motion with an Irish Blessing: "May you reap the



UN Day Award, 2000



Brenda's Nativity Scene

autumn gold from a long life of love and giving and when you go, may a million stars, like candles, light your way to God.' I have no doubt

that is what happened to Brenda when she died on Sunday. May our celebration of her shining life continue to help light her way to God."

This humble lass from Ireland's poorest county influenced more people, systems, and organizations than she could have imagined. Her quiet yet steadfast manner moved politicians and civic leaders to action. Her compassionate presence brought hope to countless dialysis patients, homebound seniors, and others. She was comfortable in both public and personal arenas, bringing God's loving, supportive, challenging, authentic presence in whatever way the person and circumstance needed.



Warm clothes for the poor



As death came for her, Brenda gratefully embraced it. She knew God is good all the time, and she looked forward to reuniting with God and the many loved ones who had traveled home before her.

Diamond Jubilee, 2009



Yet another award from a grateful city