

Sister M. Michelle Olley, OP
Born to earthly life: October 21, 1927
Religious profession: August 15, 1949
Entered eternal life: April 26, 2019

*As you did it to one of the least
of these sisters and brothers of mine,
you did it to me.*

Mt. 25, 40



Little Catherine

Catherine Marie Olley was born to Alvina Meyer and George Walter Olley of Racine on October 21, 1927, and baptized at Saint Patrick Parish.

After high school, she accepted an invitation to teach with the Racine Dominicans at Saint Mary's in Janesville, Wisconsin, and while there, on February 2, 1947, became a postulant. Back in Racine on the following August 4, she received the Dominican habit and the name Sister



High School Graduation



1952

M. Michelle of Divine Wisdom.

Her first profession on August 15, 1949, was followed by an assignment to teach at Saint John's in South Milwaukee, where she taught until 1951. From then until 1955 she was assigned to Saint Francis Xavier School in Merrill, Wisconsin. She celebrated her final profession on August 15, 1955.

That autumn found her at Saint Benedict the Moor in Milwaukee, where she served for two years before being transferred again to

Merrill, where she taught until 1963, also serving as principal from 1957 until 1963. In the meantime and after, she spent most of her summers studying, earning a baccalaureate degree from Barat College in Lake Forest, Illinois, in 1959 and eventually a master's degree in physics from Notre Dame University in 1964 and a master's degree in organizational development from Loyola University in Chicago in 1988.

In 1963, Michelle was assigned to Saint Catherine's High School in Racine, and in 1965 was appointed vice-principal alongside Monsignor Stanley Witkowiak.

She left Saint Catherine's in 1970 to join the pastoral team at Saint Patrick's Parish in Racine. While there, she was elected to the Racine Unified School Board, a post she occupied for six years, serving as the Board's president for three of those years.



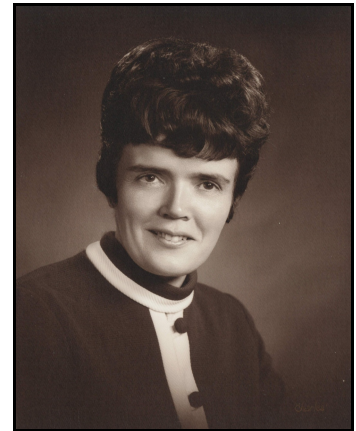
1969

In 1976 she began a year of ministry with Father Jack Murtaugh at Racine's Center for Community Concerns. This was followed by a year caring for her aging mother in Franksville, Wisconsin.

In 1978 she co-founded the Senior Companion Program based at Siena Center, serving as its director until 1980. At that point she accepted an invitation to become episcopal delegate for Christian education for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, a post she filled until 1988. From 1988 until 1995 she worked in educational research and development in Racine.



Golden Jubilee, 1999



1972



Silver Jubilee, 1974

In July of 1995 Michelle became executive director of Racine's Center for Community Concerns. For six years there she worked to raise up local needs and mobilize the community to begin to address those needs. She wrote numerous articles and commentaries about life in Racine County and how the lives of its entire people might be enhanced. She also wrote regularly for the *Racine Journal Times* "Parson to Person" column.

She was proud to be an active member of NCAN, the National Coalition of American Nuns, advocating for women's rights in the world and Church.

“She was always working on different kinds of projects and jobs that entailed a lot of responsibility,” Sister Betty said of her older sister. “I think that was always her motto: Do the best you can wherever you are.”

“I have admired Sister Michelle throughout my career in Catholic education,” said Brenda White, president of Siena Catholic Schools. “When I first became a Catholic school principal in 1986, her positive energy and vibrant leadership inspired me as a young professional. Many years later, when I began in my role as president of Siena Catholic Schools of Racine, Sister Michelle would visit me in my office at Siena Center. She was a strong supporter of bringing our Catholic schools together as a regional system, and she would engage in conversations with me about school funding and board governance. She had such a bright mind as an educational leader. Sister Michelle always made it clear to me that she was in my corner, encouraging me with a smile and words of wisdom. I hope to carry on her legacy of positive influence on Catholic education.”

Michelle was seventy-four when she moved into a ministry of volunteer activities in 2001, living with her sister Betty in a rented house on Park Avenue. (Betty had entered the community in 1955 and had made profession as Sister Gregory Ann in 1958.)

By about of 2019, Michelle was growing noticeably weaker and, to insure adequate care and assistance, she and Betty moved to Siena Center.

Michelle became bed-ridden in the community health care center on On the evening of April 21 the sisters gathered to anoint her and to sing the *Salve Regina*. She entered Hospice Care the following day. The afternoon of April 26, Father Steve Varghese stopped in after the community liturgy to bless her. Betty and other family members and sisters were with her around the clock as she prepared for death, which came very peacefully about 11:30 that same evening. She was



Betty and Michelle, 2008



Betty and Michelle, 2009

ninety-one years old.

In August, Michelle would have celebrated her seventieth jubilee of religious profession. Concluding her “Creed of Life,” she had reflected: *“I believe that Dominican Life is sustained, strengthened, and characterized by a spirit of co-discipleship in Christ’s mission, the courage and creativity of Dominic and Catherine, peace with one’s own commitment, contemplation, and worship, searching for truth, and acting for justice ... all within the context of a vibrant, caring, faith community. Community is the privileged place for evangelization of self and others.”*

Michelle’s funeral liturgy was celebrated at Siena Center on Wednesday morning, May 1. Cremation followed at a later date, with burial in the Olley family plot at Holy Cross Cemetery in Caledonia.



Diamond Jubilee

Ss. Mary Catherine Nilles, Michelle Olley, Evelyn Lins, Therese Rotarius; Audrey Affholder



The Olleys: Donald, Francis, Raymond; Dad, Fr. Ed, Mom; Michelle, David, Betty

