



## Sister Lois Vanderbeke, OP

Born to earthly life: May 7, 1936

Religious profession: August 15, 1958

Entered eternal life: June 4, 2016

“Those who instruct many in justice  
will shine like stars forever.” Daniel 12:3

**I**T IS EASY TO ENVISION SISTER LOIS VANDERBEKE SHINING LIKE A STAR, as her energy, talents and efforts were deeply rooted in creating systems to confront injustice and in working personally to ensure people’s rights.

Lois Marie Vanderbeke, born to Leontine (Teeny) and Joseph Vanderbeke on May 7, 1936, in Detroit, Michigan, was the oldest of five children. She attended Assumption Grotto School and Nativity High School, and she grew up thinking the Racine Dominicans were the only sisters in existence. Thus, “when I decided to try religious life for myself, I headed to Racine!” she said.

On August 17, 1956, she became Sister Mary Mark until returning to her baptismal name in the late 1960s. She taught second grade and high school, but most of her teaching years were spent at Dominican College. When the college closed in 1974, she served as the community’s director of finance for the next 23 years.

S. Lois was a true pioneer in helping religious congregations assess their financial future. “I learned about investing, retirement planning and insurance, all of which was good preparation for later negotiating salaries for religious,” she noted. S. Lois led the way in developing systems of financial planning for religious communities across the nation by consulting with them and through her presentations at the National Association of Treasurers of Religious Institutions (NATRI).

After seeing a front-page article in the *Wall Street Journal* – which quoted S. Lois – about the financial challenges facing religious congregations with dwindling numbers and aging members, the U.S. Bishops awoke to the need for a national Office for Religious Retirement, which was created in the early 1980s and still helps communities today.

“Lois is remembered often by religious communities for her foresight in retirement planning, helping underfunded congregations build their retirement funds and for developing the ‘12 Year Cash Flow model’,” S. Maryann McMahan reflected. With that model, they could calculate an estimate of their future retirement needs and plan accordingly. S. Lois advised congregations to participate in government programs, like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and to advocate for lay equivalent salaries for sisters in ministry. “Lois’ life reflected her commitment to justice and rights for all people,” S. Maryann said.

When Shari Geertsen left the for-profit accounting world to direct the Racine Dominican finance office, “S. Lois taught me how the work of the office supported the mission and ministries of the congregation,” she wrote. “She taught me to use the tools and financial projection models available and how to analyze the results. I soon learned that many of these tools, projections, and practices were designed by S. Lois and used by congregations around the country.”

The financial brilliance for which S. Lois was respected locally and nationally was fueled by her passion for justice. With insidious forces such as the School of the Americas causing devastation in the 1980s, she was active with the Central American Solidarity Coalition since its inception, serving as its treasurer for several years. “Lois is responsible for my passion for human rights,” said S. Pat Chaffee, noting she had no political interest until she lived with S. Lois and learned the truth behind some of the political cover-ups of the time. S. Lois frequently wrote “Letters to the Editor” about issues of justice and peace that were published in Racine’s *Journal Times*. She truly used every tool and method available to “instruct many in justice.” Her legacy continues to thrive far and wide, as she now shines like a star forever.