



Sister Michelle Olley, OP

Born to earthly life: October 21, 1927
Religious profession: August 15, 1949
Entered eternal life: April 26, 2019

"Your love made a difference in our lives."

Shawn Olley, niece of Sister Michelle, speaking for herself and her cousins

CATHERINE MARIE, BORN OCTOBER 21, 1927, was the third of George and Alvina Meyer Olley's seven children. The family lived in Racine, and she attended St. Patrick's Grade School and St. Catherine's High School.

Catherine Marie received the name Sister Mary Michelle of Divine Wisdom when she entered the Racine Dominican community in 1947.

S. Michelle began her teaching career at St. Mary's in Janesville, WI, first as a lay teacher and then as a postulant. Her 20 years in education took her to schools in Milwaukee, South Milwaukee, Racine, Merrill and Janesville, WI. Through all subsequent ministries, S. Michelle was always an educator and a lifelong learner.

As a first year teacher, S. Gert Geigle taught Catherine Olley, a fourth grader at the time. "Even back then, she was very studious," recalled S. Gert.

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

"I have admired S. Michelle throughout my career in Catholic education," Brenda White, president of Siena Catholic Schools said. "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, S. Michelle would visit me in my office at the 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. S. 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."

Before her formal retirement, S. Michelle served as the director for Racine's Center for Community Concerns for six years. 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.

This month S. Michelle would have celebrated her 70th year of religious profession. Concluding her "Creed of Life," she 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."