

Sister Carmen Agbuis, OP



Born to Earthly Life on April 27, 1942
First Profession on August 15, 1963
Entered Eternal Life on May 13, 2023

CARMELITA MARIE AGBUIS was born on April 27, 1942 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to her parents, Elpidio and Mary Rose Agbuis. She was the oldest of the seven Agbuis children. Her parents modeled an accepting and inclusive family, welcoming ten foster children into their family, and during WWII, opening their home to those in the margins to help where they could. She described her house as a “United Nations

Family” because so many cultures were represented and celebrated at home. This diversity in her family and feeling discrimination personally would shape her life’s work.

From an early age, she felt a call to religious life and was taught by Racine Dominicans at Holy Angels School in Milwaukee. She said she found “magnetic joy, prayerfulness and generosity in loving others” in the Sisters. She made her first profession on August 15, 1963 and her final vows on July 26, 1969, and was given the religious name Sister Carmen Marcelino of the Holy Trinity.

S. Carmen received her Bachelor’s Degree from Dominican College, Master’s Degrees from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and University of Loyola in New Orleans, LA. She earned her Ph.D. from Loyola University in Chicago, IL.

She began in ministry as a teacher in schools throughout Wisconsin, including St. Patrick and St. Rita in Racine and St. Agnes and Holy Angels in Milwaukee. She worked with immigrant families in summer school programs and quickly realized that while education was critical, many students and families had needs outside the classroom that had to be met in order for students to be successful in school.

S. Carmen decided that she wanted to continue her educational path in clinical social work and psychotherapy, and she worked diligently to receive her Master’s Degrees and her Ph.D. During her career, she specialized in multi-cultural education and counseling. She worked closely with Laotians, Black and Indigenous families in areas of clinical counseling for a variety of issues. S. Carmen established a therapy department during her time at the Indian Health Board, Milwaukee translating a leading treatment and prevention model for survivors of abuse.

She was considered a pioneer in her field, yet she always kept the focus on her patients and how she could help as many as possible through her work. As she said, “I believe that in every moment of being present with patients, families and significant friends that my presence is a healing presence, and hopefully a reflection of my own faith.”

S. Carmen was a warm and welcoming presence at Siena, always taking time to send cards and notes of thanks to her family, friends, Sisters, Associates and Staff. She made true connections with people and her smile and positive approach to life is missed by those who knew her. We are grateful for S. Carmen, her faithful witness as a Dominican and for the countless ways she impacted the lives of so many.

