

Sister Cyril Marie Van Asten, OP



Born to Earthly Life on April 9, 1924
First Profession on August 4, 1945
Entered Eternal Life on December 23, 2020

DOROTHY PETRONELLA was born April 9, 1924 to John H. and Martha Van Asten in Vandebroek, Wisconsin. She was one of 14 children, and was found to be a teacher and a helper to her brothers and sisters from an early age.

Watching the caring and gentle way her second grade teacher worked with a child who was struggling with his lessons, Cyril Marie realized three things - she wanted to become a Dominican, become a teacher and help those who were unfortunate or looked down upon by others to help them feel good about themselves. Those realities led her to the Racine Dominicans. At her reception in 1943 she was given the religious name Sister Cyril Marie, names chosen to honor her brother and sister, both of whom died as children.

Sister Cyril Marie did indeed become a teacher and taught primary grades for more than 45 years. She spent many years in service to others in teaching. She served in schools in Wisconsin, Michigan and New Mexico.

After her retirement from teaching, she was called to a different dream, that of a missionary. From 1989 to 1998, she was part of the retreat team at the Ukweli Reflection Center in Kisumu, Kenya, East Africa. She spent nine years working in Kenya, and would often refer to it as her “nine-year sabbatical!” Her work included assisting the retreat team, organizing the library and giving homilies. But her most favorite work was assisting the Kenyan workers in the gardens and teaching them the beauty of working with the earth.

After she left Kenya in 1998, she returned to Siena and served in many ways, especially in the gardens and grounds at Siena. She was a woman of strong faith, with a deep devotion to both the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Mother. She faithfully prayed the rosary and regularly took part in daily prayer and Mass.

As she aged, she was very observant and assisted those who were helping her with meals by holding a plate or a bowl to make things easier for them. She didn't waste a thing and always scraped her plate clean. She reused cards, added thoughtful messages along with prayers (that were just perfect for the receiver) and sent them to numerous family members, friends, sisters and associates. Many at her Remembering Service mentioned the thoughtful and inspiring notes, cards and letters they had received from Sister Cyril Marie.

She sought to live the truth and made a difference by the ways she reached out to all and helped people feel good about themselves. We are so grateful that her dreams became reality and for her powerful witness to the Dominican life.

