

Sister Mary Watson, OP



Born to Earthly Life on December 7, 1934

First Profession on August 15, 1956

Entered Eternal Life on February 1, 2021

MARY CATHERINE Watson (Mary Carl) was born December 7, 1934 to Carl and Lucy Watson in Highland Park, Michigan. She grew up in the Detroit area, the fourth of eleven children and the first daughter in her family. Her grandmother lived at home and was an important part of the family, and Mary, along with her brothers and sisters, were encouraged to help their elderly neighbors. The connection to older adults like her grandmother and neighbors would shape her life's work.

Mary was taught by Racine Dominican Sisters at St. Clement School in Michigan, and the Sisters had a lasting impression on her. She knew in eighth grade that she was called to join the Dominicans. As her family would say, Mary entered into all that she did with enthusiasm, and becoming a Racine Dominican Sister was no exception.

Sister Mary spent many years in food service, many of them as a Certified Dietician. She began her ministry in 1957 at St. Catherine's Convent in Racine, then moved onto Roxbury and Oconomowoc, both in Wisconsin, to work in senior living facilities. She next went to Nebraska to Osmond General Hospital, where she found healthcare to be a new and interesting experience. Her next move would bring her back to Michigan as the dietary supervisor at Mt. Carmel Mercy Hospital in Detroit. It was during her time at the hospital that she was approached to start a program for seniors at St. Patrick's Church.

In 1973 she founded St. Patrick Senior Center in an unused school building. It began as a free meal program with diners occasionally dropping quarters in her apron pockets as they were able. It was a place where anyone who came would find love and understanding. She started with no budget, and about seven diners a day, and slowly word spread and the need for services grew. Sister Mary envisioned a Center that would not only meet the basic need of a good meal, but also provide services for the whole person.

Sister Mary worked for many years to raise funds and seek out grants to grow the ministry. She always jumped in and did whatever tasks needed to be done, and found volunteers to help her with special projects. She was a strong advocate for the elderly on local and state levels for more than forty years. A volunteer said, "Sister Mary raised awareness of the needs of the elderly beyond meals and showed people the Center was about providing dignity for the seniors." She was the engine of the center, keeping it moving forward, growing larger and serving more people. Her love of older adults was evident in her work, and she took seniors into her heart.

Today St. Patrick Senior Center provides valuable services including hot and nutritious meals, a health clinic and transportation assistance, classes in art, technology, exercise and dancing, healthy living and social activities. And continuing with the cornerstone of Sister Mary's mission from the very early days, the Center provides participants with a closely knit and caring community where seniors can feel welcome and involved. The Center truly takes care of the mind, body and spirit of the older adults that are served, a legacy that started with Sister Mary and a few hot meals a week.

She moved back to Racine in 2017 to retire at home with her Sisters. She was happy, joyful and helpful to all during her retirement years at Siena.

Sister Mary had a saying that she quoted often, "take care of God's people and God will take care of you." In the course of her life, Sister Mary has taken great loving care of God's people, especially of the older adults she so proudly and humbly served for more than 40 years. And now she is receiving God's loving care for her.

