



## Sister Brenda Walsh, OP

Born to earthly life: July 2, 1932\*  
Religious profession: August 15, 1961  
Entered eternal life: June 10, 2018

*\* In Ireland, the day someone goes to town and registers a child's birth is the "official" birthdate, which for S. Brenda was August 2. That is the date she used on all official documents. Her actual birthdate, however, was July 2.*

*"God is good – all the time. All the time God is good."*

*Sister Brenda's mantra*

**A**NYONE WHO KNEW SISTER BRENDA WALSH WOULD HAVE HEARD THESE HEARTFELT WORDS, probably more than a few times! As S. Mary Ann Pevas noted at S. Brenda's funeral, she "lived a full and passionate life" firmly rooted in her deep, contemplative, unwavering faith.

Delia Agnes, born July 2, 1932, was the fourth of James and Mary Walsh's five children. Growing up on the family farm near Dangenmore in County Mayo, Ireland, Delia learned early the family values of compassion and sharing. The Walshes were poor but never hesitated to reach out to others and share what little they had. S. Brenda believed, "If you have something you're not using, it doesn't belong to you," and that's how she lived her life.

From an early age, Delia wanted to join a religious community, and her life's journey eventually led her across the ocean to New York, then across the country to Chicago and finally on to Racine, where she recognized she was home. Upon being received into the Racine Dominican community in 1959, she was given the name Sister Brendan, which she changed after the Vatican II Council to S. Brenda.

S. Brenda's visionary leadership abilities were apparent in her early ministries as religious education coordinator and vice-president of the community. She often quoted T. S. Eliot: "Do I dare, do we dare, disturb the universe?" She *did* disturb the universe on a regular basis, and detractors found her a force to be reckoned with!

S. Brenda was the founder and first director of the Senior Companion Program (SCP) to address the isolation older adults often experience. Still serving Racine's seniors 40 years later, SCP connects them to local services, faith communities, family and friends, giving hope and meaning to their lives. She co-founded Racine in the '80s, a conference for leaders to discuss issues resulting from the decade's poor economy, which ignited task forces focusing on critical areas of need. The conference evolved into a justice advocacy and outreach organization, with S. Brenda as executive director. Racine in the '80s continued through the 1990s, becoming Racine 2000 and Beyond. Whatever S. Brenda's involvements, "I try to take the Racine Dominican charism out into the community and find different ways to bring faith and justice to light the lives of others," she reflected in 2008.

Thirty years ago, S. Brenda worked tirelessly and tenaciously against major hurdles and numerous skeptics to bring faith and justice to light the lives of others in founding Racine's Health Care Network. The fledgling organization brought medical access to families who could afford none. Three decades later, the well-established Network has scheduled more than 206,000 medical and dental appointments and dispensed over 88,000 prescriptions for people without health care coverage.

The humble lass from Ireland's poorest county influenced more people, systems and organizations than she could imagine. Her quiet yet steadfast manner moved politicians and civic leaders to action. Her compassionate presence brought hope to countless dialysis patients and home-bound seniors. She was comfortable in both public and personal arenas, bringing God's loving, supportive, challenging, authentic presence in whatever way the person and circumstance needed.

As death came for her, S. Brenda gratefully embraced it. She knew God is good all the time, and she looked forward to her reunion with God and the loved ones who traveled Home before her.