



Sister Suzanne Noffke, OP

Born to earthly life: March 3, 1937
Religious profession: August 15, 1957
Entered eternal life: April 14, 2020

*“A poem happens when the souls of words find each other,
and discover they can say what only Silence feels.”*

– Sister Suzanne

IONE WILHELMINA, one of Harry and Minnie Noffke’s seven children, was born on March 3, 1937, in Appleton, WI. Through the next 83 years, she went on to become Sister Suzanne, a teacher, president of the community, translator, writer, historian and Siena on the Lake coordinator ... a person loved and respected locally, nationally and internationally for her scholarship, wisdom, humor and humility.

The news of S. Suzanne’s death shook not only the Racine Dominican community, but Dominicans globally who had benefitted from her presentations, retreats and kindness. A few excerpts from tributes follow:

“Suzanne became the greatest scholar of Catherine studies in the English-speaking world. She was a joy to work with, and I cherish our friendship that spanned 40 years.” – S. Diane Kennedy, Sinsinawa

“Mostly, I remember Suzanne for her humbleness. I was always struck by that. Age did not change her. Neither did honors or awards for her work.” – S. Barbara Kukla, Racine

“Suzanne was truly a global Dominican woman; she touched the lives of all the US Dominican women – and wider – with her generous spirit and ways of helping us all to understand our Dominican heritage and legacy.” – S. Pat Siemen, Adrian

“She was an exceptional woman, a true Dominican scholar, and a gift to the OP family.” – S. Michaela and your sisters of Blauvelt

“Home to God, joining the Communion of Saints, and enjoying a meeting face to face with Catherine of Siena, to whom she devoted so much of her life and intellectual prowess. No one could be happier to meet Suzanne than Catherine.” – Associate Laura Gellott, Racine

“Wasn’t she a marvelous gift to the Racine Dominicans and to the whole Order? She was a special gift to me as well. She assisted me in refining the text of ‘Caterina da Siena.’ I’ll always remember her sitting on the piano bench next to me, helping me find the best words. It was a wonderful moment!” – Fr. Jim Marchionda, OP

“A great light has dimmed amongst us, but its brilliance enhances heaven’s glory! Suzanne’s legacy includes all her extraordinary scholarship for sure, but more, the memories of her as our sister! ... May she receive the rewards of her magnificent life here among us as she enters the compassionate embrace of God.” – S. Honora Werner, Caldwell

“She was always a quiet leader. Aware of her gifts, courageous in using her gifts, always, always, always aware that they were gifts to be given to and for others – totally, genuinely humbly.” – S. Pat Chaffee, Racine

“I can imagine Suzanne and Catherine of Siena in deep conversation, probing their life’s work together, and it makes me smile! ... It was a privilege to have known her and benefited from her deep learning.” – S. Mary Ellen Gevelinger, Sinsinawa

“Her legacy will continue to live on through her writings for us and future generations.” – S. Gretchen Sills, Grand Rapids

“We have a saint in heaven although we feel a tremendous loss on earth.” – S. Ann Huffstetter, Houston

“When I came home one day, Suzanne said, ‘Rita, tell me what you think.’ She and Mary Ann Pevas were working on the Constitution revision. Suz read their text about mission, concluding with ‘committed to truth, compelled to Justice,’ and I was blown away! She captured the essence of things in such a concise way.” – S. Rita Lui, Racine

“What a loss to the whole Dominican family! She was such a gift to us all... We’ve been imagining here that she’s having a grand time engaging in dialogue with Catherine of Siena!” – S. Elise Garcia, Adrian

“Suzanne’s death gives me pause to remember and be grateful for the talents of each of our sisters, no matter our location. Rest now, Suz, with the gentle breath of God.” – S. Janet Ackerman, Racine

“One of the pillars of the Order now embraces her God and all the Dominicans awaiting her.”
– S. Rebecca Ann Gemma, Springfield

“I remember always her smile as she greeted me and calling me by her made-up title for me ‘Rosa, of the lilies of the valley,’ and I called her ‘Suzanne of the holy angels.’” – S. Jo Romero, Racine

“A wonderful Dominican preacher, scholar, and sister in community. May she be enjoying reunion with her aunt, Sister Annette Kemps, who was also a Racine OP, and with the heavenly Dominican Family.” – Fr. Paul Colloton

“Not only did she bring the human qualities of Catherine to life, she was for so many of us a friend of Dominic, always experiencing and seeing him as a brother. Please know we now have a sister who is seeing God face to face....and her name for all eternity is Suzanne.” – S. Ann Willits, Sinsinawa

“When I participated in her Catherine of Siena retreat, it was so rich, profound and ‘mystical.’ When Suzanne was speaking about Catherine... sometimes I didn’t know if Catherine was speaking or Suzanne! She was so in tune with Catherine. That was one of the most fruitful, enriching retreats I ever participated in.” – S. Joyce Ballweg, Racine

“She was such a wonderful person and scholar and sister to all of us in the Dominican family, and mentor/friend to me... I owe such a special debt for her generous sharing of her scholarly work – her theological insights as well as her extraordinary linguistic gifts and her meticulous computerized research on Catherine’s texts... Suzanne is a great loss to the entire international Dominican Family and in that sense we all mourn the loss of ‘our sister.’” – S. Cathy Hilkert, Sisters of Peace

“I had always known of Suzanne’s gift with words and languages, but in the ‘80s Suz and I were asked to put together a “constitution” draft... Suzanne’s vocabulary was mammoth. Mine not so. We compromised and agreed that if I did not know a word she had in a document, we would find another with the same meaning. Needless to say, I learned many new words and not just in the English language!”
– S. Mary Ann Pevas, Racine

BECAUSE OF THE COVID 19 CORONAVIRUS, the Racine Dominicans have not yet gathered to celebrate S. Suzanne’s life. That celebration *will* come. Feeling the community’s need to honor her passing now, however, the executive team prepared a prayer ritual that was live-streamed. S. Maryann McMahon shared her reflections, a few of which follow:

“When you were in Suzanne’s presence, she was ‘with’ you. She felt with you and shared your joy or sorrow, your success or failure. She loved you just as Jesus loved all those he met along the way throughout his life’s journey. Suzanne, like Jesus, loved you, no matter what, and she called forth from each person the best in that person’s life. She was meek and humble of heart....

“Suzanne had many gifts. She was a great cook, an artist, she had an eye for beauty in all its manifestations, she had a great sense of humor, she loved to travel and soak in the beauty and culture of wherever she was and she loved life, family and community.

“Suzanne was delighted to be able to spend her last days in the residence and be surrounded by her sisters. The pandemic has made this journey with Suzanne more than interesting. But in the words of Catherine of Siena, ‘To the servant of God every place is the right place, and every time is the right time.’

“We believe you are in God’s embrace, Suzanne, and breathing easily. We will miss your presence among us. As Catherine proclaimed and you lived, Suzanne, your life among us calls each of us to ‘Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.’” – Catherine of Siena