



Sister Rita Martin, OP

Born to earthly life: July 25, 1920
Religious profession: August 4, 1944
Entered eternal life: August 6, 2020

“Just over two weeks ago, we celebrated Rita’s 100th birthday. Now we celebrate her new life!” S. Kathy Slesar

RITA ELEANORE, THE YOUNGEST OF LOUIS AND LOUISA MARTIN’S FIVE CHILDREN, was born on the family farm near Fowler, MI, 100 years ago. She joined siblings Gregory, Sylvester, Clement and Frances, who grew up to become Sister Geraldine, also a Racine Dominican.

Helping on the dairy farm taught Rita a strong work ethic from an early age. Her parents shared their deep faith and taught their children that all life – human, animal, plant – was a manifestation of God’s creative power worthy of reverence and respect. Louis charged his children with caring for the “runts of the litter,” either lambs or piglets. “We would help them strengthen their weak legs by lying on our stomachs with outstretched arms, offering support as the little animals tottered toward us,” Rita recalled. Her skill in supporting these vulnerable little ones led her to an important ministry decades later.

From a young age, Rita wanted to be a teacher, and for 25 years she served as an excellent teacher and principal in schools around Michigan and Wisconsin. Following the Vatican II Council, she worked in religious education and pastoral ministry for another 20 years, before going to Boysville in Clinton, MI. Though she enjoyed teaching and parish ministry, the 11 years S. Rita served in human resources at Boysville were the highlight of her ministries. She enjoyed working with the Holy Cross Brothers who ran this home for boys experiencing serious problems in their lives and/or homes. “The brothers did a wonderful job of helping the boys turn their lives around,” S. Rita said. “They were good examples of living their mission of service, and the boys respected them.”

While at Boysville, S. Rita spotted an ad in the Detroit paper requesting volunteers to help with premature babies born to drug- or alcohol-addicted mothers. The infants themselves were addicted at birth. Working three days at Boysville, she spent two days each week with the premies in Detroit. S. Rita held these vulnerable little ones, whose bodies convulsed with the painful effects of drug withdrawal, for which there was no cure. She offered the warmth of her presence as she stroked tiny arms, smaller than her finger. As she fed the babies special formula from doll-size bottles, she stroked them gently, prayed for them and sang softly. She supported and encouraged them with compassion, which filled her with pain, but also with the joy of realizing she provided comfort and love, which the babies otherwise would not experience.

When S. Rita returned to Racine in 1999, she tried to volunteer with infants at the hospital, “but the staff didn’t know what I was talking about!” she said. Her service was welcomed elsewhere, however – the Retreat Center, the Senior Companion Program and the many other areas in which she generously shared her time and talents. To her frustration, her body was weakening, yet she continued painting in the art room playing the piano many mornings, which she greatly enjoyed, until age 99 and a half.

S. Rita Martin dedicated her life to the mission: *committed to Truth, compelled to Justice*. When asked what people should know about the Racine Dominicans, she stated firmly, “We are women who look into the future to see where the needs are so we can focus our strengths and abilities to help those most in need.” For 76 years, she did this with vigor, joy and a smile that lit up the room wherever she was. We miss that smile, but know she is now Home with family, friends and classmates who awaited her coming.