

**Sister M. Theodore Tonelli, O.S.F.**

747

**Born:** March 25, 1916  
**Parents:** Theophilus and Catherine (Pomatto) Tonelli  
**Entered from:** St. John the Evangelist, Joliet, IL  
**Postulancy:** February 2, 1932  
**Novitiate:** August 12, 1932  
**Profession:** August 12, 1934  
**Died:** Tuesday, January 21, 1997 at St. Joseph Medical Center  
7:55 a.m.



**Ministry:**

1934 - 1944 St. Michael, Sigel, IL, Grades 1, 2, 3, 4  
1944 - 1946 St. Francis Xavier, Chicago, IL, Grades 3, 5  
1946 - 1953 St. Bernard, Joliet, IL, Grades 2, 3, 4, 5  
1953 - 1955 St. Joseph, Elgin, IL, Grades 3, 4  
1955 - 1956 Corpus Christi, Columbus, OH, Grade 2  
1956 - 1957 Guardian Angel Home, Joliet, IL, Grades 5, 6  
1957 - 1958 St. Mary, Plainfield, IL, Grades 5, 6  
1958 - 1960 Marybrook Academy, Maumee, OH, Grades 7, 8, Practical Nurse  
1960 - 1966 St. Francis de Sales, Toledo, OH, Principal, Grade 8  
1966 - 1967 St. Stephen, Streator, IL, Grades 7-8  
1967 - 1969 St. Michael, Worthington, OH, Grade 8  
1969 - 1972 St. Francis de Sales, Toledo, OH, Grade 8  
1972 - 1973 Joliet Junior College, Joliet, IL, Adult Education Centers  
1974 - 1976 St. Francis Reading Center, Joliet, IL, Tutor  
1972 - 1993 Stateville Prison, Joliet, IL, Chaplain  
1973 - 1980 St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Romeoville, IL, Teacher, Counselor,  
Librarian; Congregation office of studies: clerical work  
1980 - 1986 Will County Jail, Joliet, IL, Center for Correctional Concerns, Teacher  
1986 - 1993 Stateville Prison, Joliet, IL, Chaplain  
1993 Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet, IL, Retired

**Wake:** Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL, Friday, January 24, 1997  
2-7:00 p.m. with a prayer service at 4:30 p.m.

**Mass of Christian Burial:** Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL, Friday, January 24, 1997  
at 7 p.m.

**Burial:** Saturday, January 25, 1997 leaving Our Lady of Angels 9:00 a.m.  
to Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, IL, S8-L348-G1

**Survived by:** numerous cousins

*For those who have been faithful, O Lord,  
life is not ended, but merely changed.*

Sister Theodore Tonelli was born in Joliet, Illinois on March 25, 1916 to Catherine and Theodore Tonelli. When she was taken to St. Anthony Church in Joliet for Baptism, she was given the name Margarita Annunziata (the second name in honor of Mary because she was born on the Feast of the Annunciation). Her brother Theodore died as an infant. Her sister Josephine became Sister Alverna in 1927 when Margaret was eleven years old. Both of their parents were very religious persons and were delighted when their second daughter also expressed a desire to join the Joliet Franciscan Sisters.

On February 2, 1932, Margaret also became a postulant and was received into the novitiate the following August and received the name Sister Mary Theodore, a name meaning "Gift of God".

Beginning at St. Michael School in Sigel, Illinois, Sister Theodore began a ministry of teaching and administration in the elementary schools in Illinois and Ohio, which she continued for over 25 years.

In 1973, Sister Theodore began a new ministry at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in the Diocese of Joliet, where she served as instructor, librarian and counselor. Beginning that same year, Sister Theodore offered her time to minister to the residents at Stateville Penitentiary. Sister Theodore worked closely with Father Gervase Brinkman, OFM, who was Chaplain at Stateville. She continued her work there for twenty years, teaching, listening, writing, talking with the prisoners, helping them try to make sense out of their lives. Her gifts of song and letter writing were a great source of comfort to the men at Stateville. She worked to help the underserved. A friend at Stateville described her: "Her ID card says 5' 1" tall, but when she walks through the front gate she stands 10 feet tall to those of us who know her." Her dedication was noticed and often recognized by others, an inspiration to those who saw her. She received numerous awards recognizing her service: 1983 Charles Livingston Award from The Retired Senior Volunteer Program, 1981 RSVP Hall of Fame from Senior Services of Will County, Volunteer of the Month at Stateville, and others.

In 1993 Sister Theodore retired at Our Lady of Angels but continued in her ministry of correspondence and prayer for those at Stateville. As her health failed, Sister Theodore continued to pray in the midst of her pain and suffering for all the neglected of our world. When the procedures of dialysis were no longer able to be of help, Sister Theodore gave herself to God, completely, and she returned this "Gift of God" to her maker as she died peacefully at St. Joseph Medical Center in Joliet on the morning of January 21, 1997.

Sister Theodore, we pray that you may help us to follow the instruction of Jesus: "When I was in prison, you visited me." Now as you stand ten feet tall before your God, may you continue to watch over all God's little ones here on earth. Pray for us your former students and clients, your relatives and your Franciscan Sisters that we may live out the Gospel call of love and service. Amen. Alleluia.

