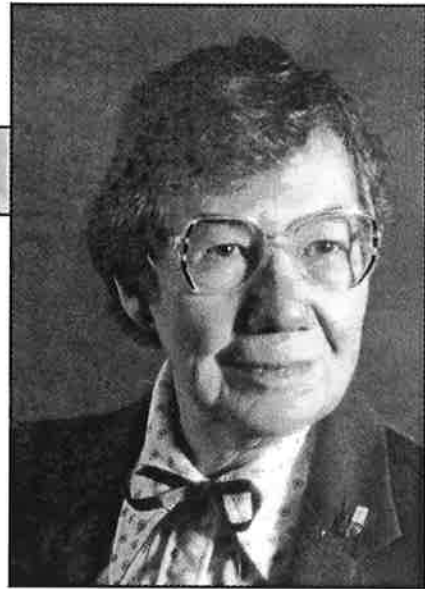


Alleluia!

Sister M. Francine Zeller, OSF



813

Born in Mansfield, Ohio on April 1, 1913, Sister Francine Zeller was baptized Genevieve Anne at St. Peter's Church. Genevieve was the youngest of three daughters of Herman and Catherine Brissel Zeller. Her sisters Mary and Catherine, our own Sister Claudia, preceded her in death.

Genevieve graduated from St. Peter's Grade School and then came to Joliet in 1926 to attend St. Francis Academy as an aspirant. On September 3, 1928, she became a postulant, where she continued her high school studies and graduated at the end of the summer. On August 12, 1929, the same day that Sister Claudia professed her first vows, Genevieve entered the Novitiate and received the name, Sister Mary Francine.

Sister Francine made first profession of vows on August 12, 1931. That fall she began her long and varied life of ministry at Corpus Christi in Columbus, Ohio, where she spent nine years teaching grades 4 through 8.

In September of 1940, she was asked to remain at the motherhouse and complete her college degree. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from the College of St. Francis in 1941 and was accepted into the Delta Epsilon Sigma Society. The next year, Francine studied at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. where in May of 1942 she received a Master of Arts in French and Romance Languages. That summer, she was asked to take a course on the role of liturgy in religion classes. The class was taught by Fr. Diekmann, OSB, and she wrote in her autobiography that it "revolutionized my life and the Mass became the focus of my life."

From 1942 to 1950, Francine taught French, English and Liturgy at the College of St. Francis, lived in the dorms with the girls, moderated the

Sodality and the French Club and was Sacristan. In 1950 she returned to the Catholic University to begin her studies for a doctoral degree. She spent the next three years in Washington, DC, a time which she once wrote were "days of beauty, grace, freedom, growth and hard work." She returned home in 1953 with everything completed but the proofreading of her dissertation. Francine graduated in 1954 with a Doctor of Philosophy in French and Romance Languages.

Sister Francine continued to teach French and Spanish at CSF from 1953 to 1959. Then in 1959, she was asked to become the director of the junior sisters, a position she filled until July 1968. According to her, these "nine years flew by." She "loved the young sisters" and "cherished the memories" of these years. With this responsibility came many opportunities such as attending Canon Law Workshops and Formation Team meetings. During this time, she was elected President of the Sisters Formation Conference which involved meetings in Rome and contact with the Sacred Congregation for Religious.

The General Chapter of 1968 elected Sister Francine General Superior of the Congregation, a position she held until 1976. This was a crucial time in the history of religious life and of our Congregation. She was the first President to work with a team form of government. Vatican II called for change and

adaptation and she moved the Congregation forward. Francine wrote that these eight years were “strenuous, difficult, rewarding, strengthening and inspiring.”

As General Superior, Sister Francine was active in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). She was elected chairperson of Region VIII (Illinois), was a member of the Executive Committee and on the National Board. In 1973 she was elected to the LCWR Presidency, serving as Vice-President in 1973-74, President in 1974-75 and Past President in 1975-76. Because of this, Francine traveled to Rome, South America, Canada and throughout the United States. She attended international conferences and meetings. All of these experiences enriched Francine and the Congregation. Notre Dame Sister Mary Daniel Turner, the Executive Director of LCWR in 1975, wrote of Francine, “Her style of directing the Conference, of supporting the national staff, of being present to the members and to other national groups, revealed a person of unusual self-effacement, of courageous leadership and of sensitive moral persuasiveness.”

The year after completing her term in Congregation leadership, Sister Francine studied spiritual theology at Regis College in Toronto, Canada. Thus began her ministry of spiritual direction, retreat work and trainer of spiritual directors, which she continued for the rest of her life. Francine served as a staff member at the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts and at our St. Clare House of Prayer in Kankakee, Illinois. In 1982, with Fr. Tom Spaier, OFM, she began a training center for Franciscans in Spiritual Direction in Cincinnati, Ohio. After returning from Ohio, she continued her ministry using offices in the Diocese of Joliet Pastoral Center or in the places where she lived.

In February 1987 while attending a Franciscan meeting in Tampa, Florida, Sister Francine suffered

a stroke that impaired her on the left side. After a long rehabilitation in Florida, she returned to Joliet and then broke her hip on September 14th. It was after this that she permanently moved to Our Lady of Angels. She once wrote of this year as “the black days of 1987.”

Being physically dependent on others was a great hardship for a woman whose mind and spirit were so alive and vibrant. Through it all she continued her work of helping those who, as she put it, “are seeking closer union with our God.”

The day before she died, Francine attended the memorial Mass for Bernice Doppke at Our Lady of Angels. She said she was not feeling too well, but did not complain of being in any pain. When the staff checked on her just before 2:00 a.m. on the morning of May 20th, they found, that in her sleep, Francine had quietly gone home to her God.

Through the years Sister Francine was a noted speaker and writer to a wide variety of audiences. As Superior General she served on the boards of our sponsored institutions. She received many awards, among them an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the College of St. Francis in 1973 and the President’s Award from the College of St. Francis in 1976. She is listed in the book, *Outstanding Personalities of the West and Midwest*, as well as the *Who’s Who in America*, *The World Who’s Who of Women* and the *American Catholic Who’s Who*.

Sister Francine, in 1976 you wrote, “Any one of us who was a leader during the past decade knows that the times were hard, that we paved the way for those who would follow so it would be easier, and that the true recognition of our efforts is reserved to God.” We thank you for your leadership, for your friendship, for the spiritual gifts you shared with us these 72 years. As you begin your eternity in the presence of the God you served so faithfully, may you remember us your family, your friends, your Franciscan sisters. Amen! Alleluia!

Sister M. Francine Zeller, O.S.F.
1 April 1913 - 20 May 2001

813

Born: April 1, 1913, Mansfield, Ohio
Parents: Herman and Catherine (Brissel) Zeller
Entered From: St. Peter, Mansfield, Ohio
Postulancy: September 3, 1928
Novitiate: August 12, 1929
Profession: August 12, 1931
Entered New Life: Sunday, May 20, 2001, at Our Lady of Angels at 1:50 a.m.

Ministry History

1931 - 1940 Teacher Grades 4,6,7 & 8; Corpus Christi, Columbus, OH
 1940 - 1941 Student; College of St. Francis, Joliet, IL
 1941 - 1942 Student; Catholic University, Washington ,D.C.
 1942 - 1950 Professor; College of St. Francis, Joliet, IL
 1950 - 1953 Doctoral Student; Catholic University, Washington, D.C.
 1953 - 1968 Professor; College of St. Francis and Juniorate Director; St. Francis Convent
 1968 - 1976 Superior General; St. Francis Convent, Joliet, IL
 1974 - 1975 President of Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)
 1976 - 1977 Student; St. Joseph Hospital and Regis College, Toronto, Ont.
 1977 - 1980 Staff Member; Center for Religious Development, Cambridge, MA.
 1980 - 1982 Spiritual Direction; St. Clare House of Prayer, Kankakee, IL
 1982 - 1983 Staff Member; St. Francis Center, Cincinatti, OH
 1983 - 1988 Spiritual Direction; St. Charles Pastoral Center, Romeoville, IL
 1988 - 1989 Spiritual Direction; Joliet, IL
 1989 - 2001 Spiritual Direction; Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL

Wake: Wednesday, May 23, 2001, 2 - 7:00 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL
Wake Service: Wednesday, May 23, 2001, 4:30 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL
Mass of Christian Burial: Wednesday, May 23, 2001, 7:00 p.m., Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL
Burial: Thursday, May 24, 2001; leaving Our Lady of Angels at 9:00 a.m.
 to Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, IL

Interment S8 - L347 - G7

Survived by: Cousins

Rest in Peace, Sister Francine

