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Dear Friend,

In 2001, the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore merged with the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, located in the Milwaukee suburb of St. Francis.

It was a pleasant surprise to learn that three of the sisters in Baltimore (one of whom is now deceased) originally came from the Midwest. There was some instant bonding because, unlike many sisters in Milwaukee who had to find out exactly where Baltimore was located, these particular Baltimore Franciscans knew something about Milwaukee, and they cheer for the Green Bay Packers!



Sr. Angela Perrizo (left) and  
Sr. Catherine Morrissey (seated)

Sister Catherine Morrissey is from Hibbing, Minnesota, and Sister Angela Perrizo is from North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Both left the Midwest to enter the Franciscan Sisters of Mill Hill, who had been invited to come from England to work with the African American orphans in Baltimore. In 1982, those sisters formed an American Province and changed their congregation name to the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore.

Neither sister knew the Baltimore congregation they were entering except through advertisements in Catholic publications. Religious communities in their hometowns had invited them to join their congregations, but both were drawn to minister to African Americans. Sister Angela says that, in addition to the ministry focus, she wanted a small community that was far from home.

How God calls someone to religious life is always very individualized. For both sisters, their fathers, by example, helped them find their path.

Sister Angela, baptized Patricia, grew up on a family-homesteaded farm about three miles north of North Fond du Lac. She was the oldest of four children; a brother and two sisters were born after her. The one-room school house she attended for grades one through eight was located on the road next to their driveway. For high school,



(ABOVE) Sr. Angela is pictured here with some of the children she had hoped to serve when she entered the Baltimore congregation.

(BELOW) Sr. Angela (left) demonstrates that she is a Packer fan with Sr. Lucilda Sewald (dec. 2010).



Sister Angela went to St. Mary of the Springs on the outskirts of Fond du Lac. It was quite a transition from the small grade school to a large urban high school.

Sister Angela remembers how her father helped build their parish church, and one year, after a very good harvest, he donated a tabernacle to the church. She says she had a “spark” for religious life for a long time, and it steadily grew stronger.

For five years after graduation, Sister Angela worked researching abstracts for a real estate company. When she decided to enter the convent in August of 1950, her parents drove her to Baltimore, stopping first in Arlington, Virginia, to visit her Dad’s sister.

The second of four children, Sister Catherine, who was baptized Rosemary, had an older brother and two younger sisters. She attended the parish grade school, which was staffed by the Benedictine Sisters, and went to the public high school. She traces her initial leaning toward religious life to going to daily Mass with her father. Her mother died when she was 12 and her father was left with a family to raise. The following Lent he began attending daily Mass. Sister Catherine went with him and that ritual became part of life. Her love of the Lord grew.

After graduation, she helped at home for a year. In September of 1945, at age 19, she boarded a train for Baltimore. The farthest she had traveled up to that point was Chippewa Falls in Wisconsin. The train ride lasted a day and a half, and it felt to her as if she was going to Europe. When the conductor called out “Bawlymah,” Sister Catherine would have missed her stop if the gentleman next to her had not asked her if she was getting off in Baltimore. This was her introduction to the mid-Atlantic accent.

In 1952, her sister, Laura Jean, who was 18 months younger, also entered the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore and was given the name

Mary Timothy. The sisters shared family and community life together until Sister Timothy's death on June 7, 2006.

Sisters Angela and Catherine both describe their early years of teaching as very difficult. Three years after entering the community, they professed their first vows and were sent out to teach. At that time, there was a lot of pressure from parishes to staff the Catholic schools, so sisters often were going to college at the same time that they were teaching, thus learning on the job. The saving grace, Sister Catherine says, was that students then had respect for their teachers and discipline was not a major issue. Asked how they made it through the tough times, the answer was "perseverance."

Sister Catherine ministered in a variety of positions throughout the years: teacher, principal, formation director, local superior, and house mother. But her long-term ministry was in special education at St. Elizabeth School in Baltimore for 35 years. There she helped students prepare for living as independently as possible after they left school at age 22. Her classes included values, social skills, money management, how to live in a society that is not always accepting of those with special needs, and other skills. When Sister Catherine wasn't in the classroom she was 'on the court' coaching basketball. (PHOTO AT BOTTOM RIGHT).

Sister Angela taught elementary school for 30 years in Yonkers and Harlem, New York, and Norfolk, Virginia. She was also formation director for a time, did a variety of clerical jobs at the Motherhouse, and served in leadership for the community.

One of her most interesting experiences was teaching a class of first graders in Yonkers, leaving for a period of time and then returning



(ABOVE) Sisters Timothy (left) and Catherine (right) are shown fishing with their father, and (BELOW) with their sister and nephew.



to teach them in seventh and eighth grades. When the class held a reunion in 1988, they sent a limousine to pick up Sister for the gathering. Also, just recently a former student from Norfolk stopped to visit and thank Sister Angela for inspiring her to be a teacher.

Today both sisters are retired and live at Clare Court, the former Motherhouse of the Baltimore Franciscans. Twelve years ago, part of the first floor was converted into a supportive living area for our retired sisters and the chapel on the second floor was retained. Homes for America developed three townhouses and 27 apartments for low income housing in the rest of the building. As a result, the sisters have a built in neighborhood right in their building.

During our interview I asked them about their nicknames. Sister Catherine is more usually called 'Katie.' You might say that this originated out of necessity years ago. There were four Sister Catherines living in what was then St. Elizabeth Convent, and there was a lot of confusion when one of them was summoned over the intercom. So Sister Catherine started to be called Sister Katie and it has stuck. Sister Angela, on the other hand, continues to use

Sister Angela because her family asked her not to change back to her baptismal name after Vatican Council II. However, they all call her 'Patty' because of her baptismal name.

Each of our sisters' lives is so unique. It is a privilege to share the stories of these two with you. They have spent their lives serving others out of a love that God planted in their hearts early in their lives. Now at the end of their lives, I invite you to help them live with a sense of security by making a donation to assist with the costs of retirement. When these sisters were teaching, their stipends were extremely minimal. It certainly never included anything to put aside for future retirement needs. Whatever you are able to give will be most appreciated, and in turn, you will be remembered each day in the prayers of our sisters.

May God bless you for your generosity and give you Peace.

Most gratefully,



Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF



Sr. Angela (fifth from right, front row) is pictured with the class celebrating a reunion in 1988.



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