

Sisters of
St. Francis
of Assisi

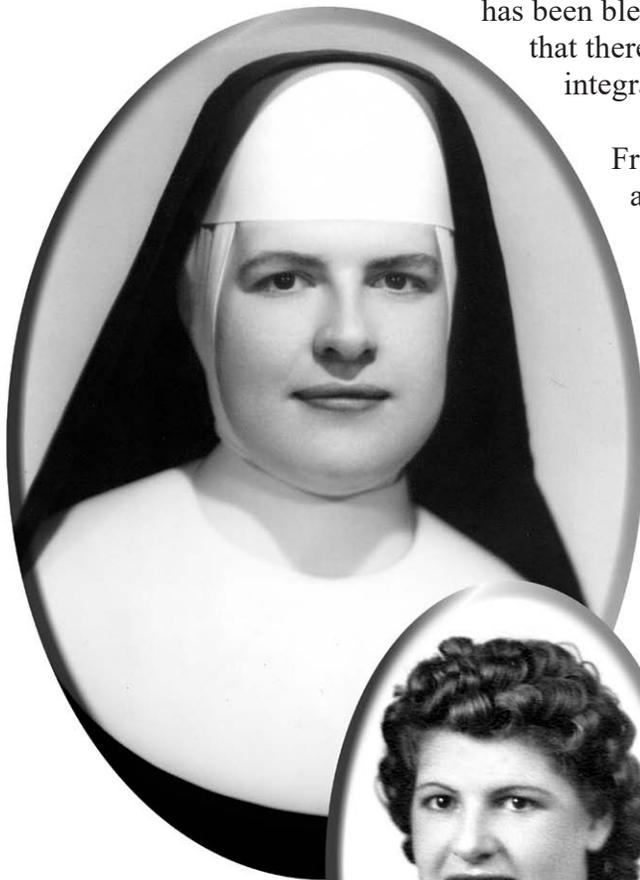
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Dear Friend,

Counting one's blessings is truly the sign of a grateful heart. Sr. Lenore Steilen looks back on her life and can single out the many ways she has been blessed, beginning with her childhood. It's not to say that there weren't hard times, but in retrospect, those get integrated into life's journey.



From a young age, Sister Lenore wanted to be a sister and a teacher. She was born in Farmer, South Dakota, the fourth of 10 children, seven girls and three boys. Her parents were Joseph and Louise (Kass) Steilen. At St. Peter Elementary School, our sisters taught her and inspired her to be a sister. She entered our community after graduation from Edgerton Consolidated High School in 1941. Her baptismal name was Rosalinda but she asked for the name Lenore at reception to the novitiate. This was the name of her youngest sister, who was only six years old at the time Sr. Lenore left for the convent, and she liked the name very much.



Sr. Lenore on her profession day on August 12, 1944, and Rosalinda on her high school graduation in 1941.

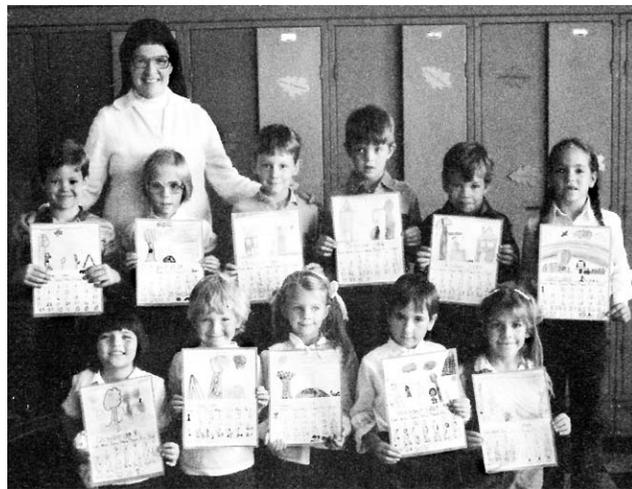
Another sister of Sr. Lenore, Leona, entered the community in 1948. She was given the name Sister Joscito at reception to the novitiate, but went back to her baptismal name after the Vatican II Council.

Sr. Lenore learned a lot about homemaking from her mother, including the rudiments of baking. These would prove to be very helpful years later. On the fun side, their dad liked to play cards with the family, and he made ice cream and candy as treats. In school, math and spelling were favorite subjects. After entering the community, Sr. Lenore earned a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in reading instruction from Cardinal Stritch University.



During 56 years of active ministry in Wisconsin (Nekoosa, New Berlin, Milwaukee) and Iowa (Wesley, Early, Bettendorf, Granger), Sr. Lenore was a teacher and principal, and after she moved out of classroom teaching, a director of religious education. For 27 of her years in full time teaching she was also the principal. Some of the most cherished memories Sister has of teaching

are preparing children for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion.



It is difficult to assess one's own effectiveness in ministry. In Sr. Lenore's life, some clues can be found in the letters and contacts made by former students who expressed their appreciation for the part Sr. Lenore played in their lives. Letters, emails and phone calls keep relationships strong for Sister. Former students came to celebrate Sister's 90th birthday at Clare Hall in 2013. As recently as last May, she received an email from a student in the first class she taught in Nekoosa asking permission to reprint one of her recipes in the parish bulletin. Recognition more formally

for teaching excellence is another clue. On January 27, 1999, Sr. Lenore received the Golden Apple Award from the local NBC affiliate in Granger, Iowa, and a recognition by the Des Moines Diocese for her years of service.

Top: Family, 1941 (l-r) – (Back) Ronald, Elverda, Joseph, Leona, (Center) Lenore, Marlys Irma, Vernon, (Front) Rosalinda, Parents Joseph & Louisa, Lorena.

Center: Sister Lenore with her first grade class at Sacred Heart School, Early, Iowa, in 1984.

Bottom: Sister working at St. Ann Center addressing envelopes.

After 56 years in active ministry, retirement gave Sr. Lenore the opportunity to volunteer for 18 years at St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care. She did whatever needed to be



done, from stuffing envelopes to mixing and bottling insect repellent. This was followed by apple sauce, apple butter and raspberry jam. One day, Sr. Edna Lonergan, OSF, the president of St. Ann's Center, asked her if she would bake some chocolate chip cookies. Even though she didn't feel that confident about baking, her 'let's give it a try' attitude prevailed, and as the folks at St. Ann's say, "the rest is delicious history." Sr. Lenore was proclaimed 'the official baker.'

For one year, from August 2008 to August 2009, Sr. Lenore kept a record of the baking she did. She worked four mornings a week and produced 167 batches of cookies in four flavors, 70 batches of scones in five flavors, 80 pans of brownies (1,200 bars), and 34 batches of cupcakes in nine flavors (612 cupcakes). These were all sold to benefit St. Ann Center.

Sister's recipe for coconut pecan cookies was requested by a reader of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* who had purchased some of the cookies. The recipe was published in the "Food Section" along with Sr. Lenore's photo on February 27, 2008. In August, 2018, at age 95, Sr. Lenore retired from baking.

While her mornings were devoted to baking, for 10 years her afternoons and evenings were devoted to making *Thank You* calls to our donors for their generosity to the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. Her conversations were welcomed, and through them many friendships were formed. She said the biggest challenge was taking note of the time zone to which she was calling so it would be a convenient time for the person she was calling. Sister Mary Kemen has taken over this activity and received many good tips from Sr. Lenore about this special ministry.



Top: Sister visits with Nancy, a 1954 first grader in Nekoosa, Wis., and her husband.



Center: Fr. Louis Studer, Provincial of the Oblates of Mary, was a one of Sister's second grade students in Wesley, Iowa.

Bottom: Sister (second from left) at a reunion of teachers from Assumption School in Granger, Iowa





(Left) Sister Lenore on her 90th birthday

(Below) Sister Lenore's famous cookies.

(Right) Receiving the Golden Apple Award from the NBC Affiliate in Granger, Iowa, in 1999.



It might seem a far stretch to say that teaching and baking have a connection, but both are focused on others. There are ways to be self-taught, but the interaction with a teacher whose whole heart and soul is centered on helping others learn is irreplaceable. It is possible to bake for one's own need, but when that baking can be shared, it takes on so much more purpose.

In Sr. Lenore's teaching and baking, doing it for the benefit of the other was always uppermost for her. This is summed up so well by an amateur baker, A. Atkins, in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* "Food Section" on May 27, 2020. "See, the thing about baking is that there's really no point in going through the hassle unless you're doing it for somebody else."

Living during the COVID-19 pandemic was not something Sr. Lenore expected in her lifetime. The experience has shown her, from a new perspective, what a blessing community life is at a time when so many people are living in isolation with little or no contact from others.

Even with social distancing measures in place, there is a bond among the sisters. They truly are in it "all together."

The dedication and hard work given in the past by our retired sisters is amazing. However, what they did in the service of others did not provide them with retirement funding for the costs of health care and other assisted living services they require now.

My request of you is to help provide for their needs in gratitude for all the ways the world is better because of these sisters' influence on others. Whatever amount you can afford to share with our sisters will be greatly appreciated. We count you as one of our blessings, and God will reward you for your generosity.

With daily prayer for you from our sisters,

Marcia Lunz, OSF

Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF



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