

# Voices

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SUMMER 2009

## Adrian Dominican Sisters Celebrate 125th Anniversary

One-hundred and twenty-five years after six Dominican nuns arrived in Adrian, Michigan to open a hospital for injured railroad workers, the property on which the hospital was founded was humming with excitement and activity. About

700 Adrian Dominican Sisters, Associates, co-workers, Dominican friars, Dominican Sisters from other congregations, family members, and representatives of sponsored institutions were arriving on campus to celebrate the Congregation's founding.

The weekend of celebrations,

prayer and presentations was the culmination of months of preparation and planning. The community of Adrian became more aware of the festivities on May 1 with a live broadcast from WLEN-Radio from the Adrian Room in Madden Hall. As Sisters and co-workers stopped by to watch the broadcast and enjoy a light breakfast, WLEN radio personality John Koehn and marketing manager Patt Hayes spoke with several Sisters and co-workers on the history of the Congregation; the celebration; religious life; and several local ministries: the Portfolio Advisory Board, Siena Heights University, St. Joseph Academy, Weber Retreat and Conference Center, and Adrian Rea Literacy Center.

The weekend festivities kicked off on the morning of May 15 with a breakfast

and media reception. Sister Donna Markham, OP, Prioress of the Congregation, thanked local officials for their support. The brief program featured words of congratulations and the presentation of proclamations from representatives of the City of Adrian, the Lenawee County Board of Commissioners, the office of Senator Debbie Stabenaw, and the office of Representative Mark Schauer. The office of Senator Carl Levin entered the history and a tribute to the Congregation into the Congressional Record.

Along with these formal presentations, the Congregation received an Apostolic Blessing from Pope Benedict XVI and letters of congratulations from the Master of the Order, Father Carlos Azpiroz Costa, OP; Sister Maria Hanna, OP, General Prioress of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine in Mosul, Iraq; the cloistered Dominican Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in Farmington Hills, Michigan; the Maryknoll Sisters; the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, San Rafael, and Sinsinawa; the Dominican Friars of the Central and Eastern Provinces; William J. Heffernan, Chair of the Barry University Board of Trustees; and the bishops of over 25 dioceses throughout the United States and Canada. The tributes were on display throughout the weekend.

Sisters, Associates, and guests began arriving on campus for the weekend of festivities which formally began with evening prayer in Holy Rosary Chapel. Setting a beautiful and sacred tone for the rest of the weekend, the service opened with music, color and movement as the Paschal Candle was carried in procession, followed by liturgical dancing with the incense. Sister Rosa Monique Peña, OP, Vicaree and General Councilor, greeted the assembly, welcoming the Sisters and Associates back home and extending a special welcome to visitors.

Sister Lorraine Reaume, OP, gave a heart-felt and moving reflection,

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*“Countless are the men and women who have been influenced by the gentle spirit and mission of the Adrian Dominicans.”*

- Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito, Bishop of Palm Beach



Sister Donna Markham welcomes the assembly during Morning Prayer on Saturday.

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noting the love and care that the Sisters show for one another but also the struggles involved in love and community. The concluding Sign of Peace gave those assembled the opportunity to greet one another with a joy and excitement that carried over into the evening’s socials.

Saturday began with a prayer service for all participants in Lumen Ecclesiae Chapel. The Sisters then gathered in Francoeur Theater at Siena Heights University. Sister Donna introduced the speaker, Sister Sarah Ann Sharkey, OP, an Adrian Dominican Sister and professor of Biblical Studies at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio.

“This is a precious and grace-filled moment,” Sister Sarah said, outlining the foundation of the Adrian Dominican Congregation. As beautiful as the past was, however, women religious today are facing a “profound paradigm shift” that challenges long and deeply-held assumptions on nearly every aspect of life.

Sister Sarah encouraged her Sisters to take on the challenge of this period of history. “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for,” she said, quoting the elders of the Hopi of Arizona. “This is our time. This is the time given to us, the only time you and I can make a difference. This is our time. How grateful we should be!” Sister Sarah urged the Sisters, in their response to the needs of the time, not to take anything personally and to act communally. “The time of the lone wolf is over.” She noted the call of women religious to take on the prophetic dimension of religious life, to “hear the word of God and act on it.”

During the afternoon session, Sister Sarah focused on two examples of courageous and pious prophetesses: Mary of Nazareth and her kinswoman, Elizabeth. The world



From top: The Most Rev. Thomas Kelly, OP, Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky, reading the Gospel. Looking on are the Most Rev. Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing, and Sister Dorothy Guettler.

Sister Nadine Foley lights a candle during Saturday Morning prayer.

Sister Sarah Sharkey addresses the Adrian Dominican Sisters on religious life in the 21st century.

Sister Jeanne Wiest adds to the musical beauty of the closing Liturgy.



Sisters, associates, friends and family gathered in Lumen Ecclesiae Chapel for the closing Liturgy.

would have considered Mary to be an “insignificant woman,” the wife of a village craftsman and mother of an itinerant preacher—and, finally, a widow, the very symbol of powerlessness. Yet, “God stepped into the ordinariness of Mary’s life” and invited her to take a very risky step. Mary had “courage to make an incredible act of faith” in responding to God’s call to be the mother of the Savior, Jesus.

Sister Sarah noted that Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, follows in a long line of strong biblical women—such as Sarah, Hannah, Judith and Esther—who responded to God’s call. Elizabeth, filled with “quiet joy,” gives her own fiat to Mary, proclaiming her blessed twice. In response, Mary sings out her Magnificat, her “song of vindication” for those who are oppressed. But, Sister Sarah explained, Mary’s view of justice is not a “reversal of the status quo” in which those who have been on top are brought down, but a vision of inclusion. “God wants everybody at the table.”

After a short break, the Sisters reassembled to give their response to Sister Sarah’s talk and to give their own views on the way they envision their lives as Adrian Dominican Sisters in the 21st Century. Many viewed Sister Sarah’s talk and the discussion that followed as an initial preparation for the next General Chapter, scheduled for February 2010.

During Sister Sarah’s presentation, Adrian Dominican Associates and guests gathered for a presentation by Sister Rosa Monique on Dominican spirituality. St. Dominic was inspired by the Gospel of Matthew and the letters of St. Paul, which he always carried with him, and “read in them the mandate to preach the Good News everywhere,” Sister Rosa Monique said.

In founding the Order of Preachers, St. Dominic took religious life in a new direction. Rather than living apart from the world as monastics of his day did, St. Dominic’s friars brought the Word of God to the world around them. St. Dominic



Members of the Adrian Dominican General Council during the Closing Liturgy. They are, from left: Sister Donna Markham, OP, Prioress; and General Council members Sister Rosa Monique Peña, OP; Sister Judy Rimbey, OP; Sister Kathy Nolan, OP; and Sister Mary Kay Homan, OP.

modified the monastic life “to make space for preaching activities,” making the Order of Preachers an apostolic order with a “twofold lifestyle of profound prayer and intensive itinerant preaching.”

Prayer and preaching (ministry) are two of the four traditional pillars of Dominican life. The other two are community and study, which is undertaken to prepare Dominicans to preach more effectively in their particular time and culture.

Yet another important element in Dominican spirituality is joy. “Dominic was intensely happy,” she said. “He sang his way through the countryside as he walked from town to town in Spain, France and Italy” and encouraged the friars and nuns in his order also to be joyful. “Gloom is not considered a virtue in the Dominican tradition,” she explained. “True joy, which springs from deep faith and hope even in the face of suffering, was one of Jesus’ centerpiece teachings.”

After lunch, the Associates and guests had the opportunity to take part in three out of five tours and presentations offered on campus.

The afternoon also included the debut for both groups of *A Living Journey*, a moving documentary on the history of the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Sister Mildred Huber, OP, after watching this historical presentation, expressed great joy and delight. “That’s my life,” she exclaimed.

After dinner, Sisters, Associates and guests at the 125th anniversary weekend capped off a full Saturday with a presentation by Sister Barbara Cervenka, OP, on the life and works of the great Dominican artist, Fra Angelico. An Associate Professor of Art at Siena Heights University, Sister Barbara recounted the life of Fra Angelico, born Guido Giovanni around 1395. As a young man, Guido traveled to Florence and became an apprentice with an artist. In 1418, he became a Dominican. While continuing as a prolific and prayerful artist, Fra Angelico held several positions for the Order of Preachers. He died in Rome in 1455 and was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

Sister Barbara emphasized Fra Angelico’s holiness as well as his artistic genius. He was “a man of the utmost simplicity of intention, and was most holy in every act of his life.” She explained that Fra Angelico “would never take the brush in hand until he had first offered a prayer” and was said “never to have painted a crucifix without tears streaming from his eyes. In the countenance and attitudes of his figures it is easy to perceive the proof of his sincerity, his goodness, and the depth of his devotion to the religion of Christ.”

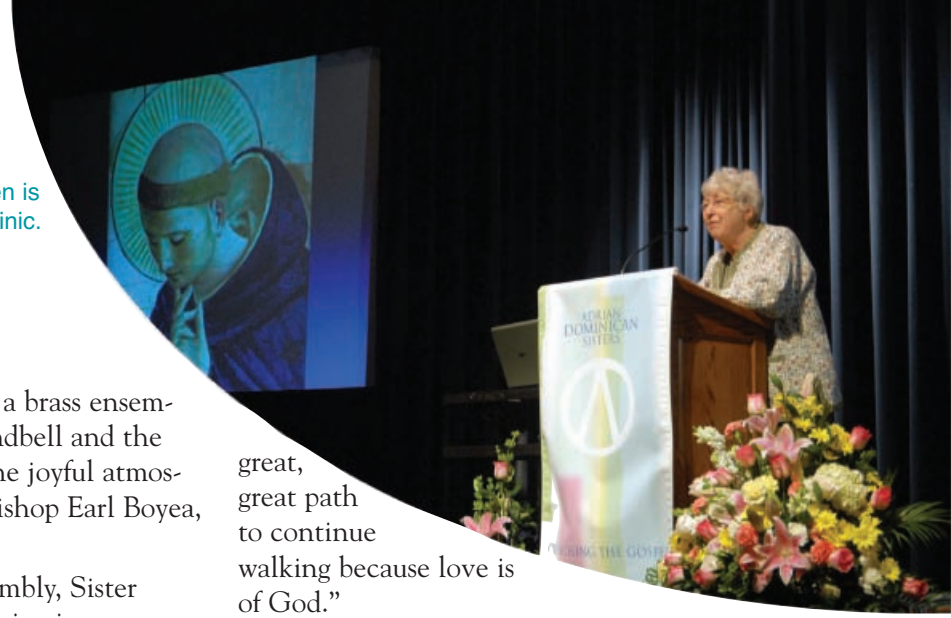
The anniversary weekend closed on a sacred, joyful and grateful note as Sisters, Associates and guests assembled in Lumen Ecclesiae Chapel for the closing Liturgy on May 17.

*(continued on next page)*



Sister Rosa Monique Peña speaks to Associates and guests about Dominican spirituality.

Sister Barbara Cervenka gives an evening presentation on the great Dominican artist, Fra Angelico. Pictured on the screen is the artist's portrayal of St. Dominic.



May flowers and music by a brass ensemble, the Motherhouse Handbell and the Chapel Choirs added to the joyful atmosphere. The presider was Bishop Earl Boyea, of Lansing.

In her greeting to the assembly, Sister Donna expressed her great joy in welcoming the assembly to the closing Liturgy on this “far-flung” plot of land amid the cornfields of Southeastern Michigan.

“I rejoice with you as you celebrate 125 years of mission,” said the Archbishop Thomas Kelly, OP, Archbishop Emeritus of

Louisville, Kentucky, and the guest homilist. He noted that all baptized Christians are chosen by God to serve the Church and the world. The Church must be a “concrete sign” in this world of God’s reign, he said.

Archbishop Kelly noted the “great joy” and friendship among the Sisters, Associates and guests that he had witnessed during the weekend.


“In the name of the Church, I say, ‘thank you,’” Archbishop Kelly told the Adrian Dominican Sisters. “Thank you for your witness and your service” for the past 125 years. He spoke of the love that members of the Congregation had shown for all of those years, and concluded, “You have a

great, great path to continue walking because love is of God.”

In his closing remarks, Bishop Boyea spoke of his own personal gratitude for the many ways in which the Adrian Dominican Sisters had served the Church – and especially the Diocese of Lansing – throughout their history. “I’m so grateful for the powerful witness,” he said.

The recessional hymn, Family of Dominic, expressed in the joyful words of Sister Mary Fran Fleischaker, OP, the gratitude that many of the people in Lumen Ecclesiae Chapel that morning might have felt at being part of a worldwide religious family.

Participants streamed out of the chapel and headed for either the Madden Hall Dining Room or Benincasa Dining Hall at Siena Heights University for a more informal closing of the celebration: a festive brunch.

Working behind the scenes to make the festivities a reality were members of the 125th Anniversary Celebration Committee: Sisters Rosemary Abramovich, OP; Leontia Cooney, OP; Durstynne Farnan, OP; Pat Magee, OP; Carleen Maly, OP; Donna Markham, OP; and Rosa Monique Peña, OP; and co-workers Linda Braman, Irene James, Mary Karen McClellan and Greg Schira. Others working hard on the celebration were administrators, staff members and student volunteers from Siena Heights University; workers in numerous offices and departments on campus; members of the Documentary Committee, which planned and produced the documentary on the Congregation’s history; members of the Liturgy Committee; Handbell and Chapel Choir members; and liturgical ministers. 

*“From the earliest days of your foundation, you have followed the example of St. Dominic and are committed to preaching the Word of God.”*

*- Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit*



(Above) Sister Nadine Foley explains the Medieval Graduale, a liturgical book which was discovered at Siena Heights University and is now on display in Holy Rosary Chapel.



(Right) Sister Barb Chenicek, liturgical artist, gives a tour of the INAI Studio.

## Special Events Bring Earth Day Home to Adrian Dominican Campus

A series of special events on the campus of the Adrian Dominican Sisters Motherhouse brought Sisters and co-workers to a greater awareness of the need to



Adrian Dominican Sisters and co-workers take part in the Universal Peace Dance, led by Sister Mary Fran Uicker, IHM. The peace dance was a featured part of the Earth Day Prayer Service.

care for their home, planet Earth. The theme for the week was, “Finding Grace and Wholeness in Everything We Choose.”

Earth Day events included a showing of the video, *The True Cost of Food*, a 15-minute animated video presented by the Sierra Club Sustainable Consumption Committee. The movie suggests eating more fruits, vegetables and grains and less meat; buying organic food; and buying locally. On April 22, the DVD, “Sense of Wonder,” was shown, depicting the life of Rachel Carson. A marine biologist, her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, brought concern for the environment to the forefront. Co-workers Margaret Weber and Chris Matthias led a discussion after the movie.

Sister Renee Richie, OP, coordinated a special prayer service in St. Catherine Chapel, which featured a Universal Peace Dance led by Sister Mary Fran Uicker, IHM.

On April 24, Dominican Life Center residents had the opportunity to view the documentary, “A Crude Awakening.” The film shows scientific evidence that the age of oil is coming to an end as the demand for oil far exceeds the supply. Sister Kathy Erard, OP, led a discussion on the film the following Sunday.

Earth Day, celebrated April 22, was begun in 1970 as an educational initiative by U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisconsin). Dominicans around the globe celebrate Earth Day. The celebration fits in well with the Adrian Dominican Sisters’ 2004 General Chapter vision to “live right relationships with Earth community.” ☺

## Sister Xiomara Méndez-Hernández Makes First Vows

A joyful crowd of Adrian Dominican Sisters, friends and colleagues rejoiced with Sister Xiomara Méndez-Hernández as she celebrated her Rite of Reception into the Novitiate on March 12 at Holy Rosary Chapel. With this significant step in the initial formation process, Sister Xiomara begins a two-year period of discernment as a novice, which may well culminate in her profession of first vows with the Adrian Dominican Sisters.

Sister Carleen Maly, OP, welcomed the guests to the reception ceremony. Celebrating with Sister Xiomara were her aunt, Sabina Hernández, of Puerto Rico; Sister Ana Feliz, OP, her mentor and spiritual guide from the

Dominican Republic; Sister Anne Liam Lees, OP, Chapter Prioress of the Florida Mission Chapter; special guests from St. Joseph Academy, where she ministers, and St. Mary Parish in Adrian where she gives reflections during Spanish-language Masses; members of her local community in the Formation House in Adrian; novices from the Collaborative Dominican Novitiate in St. Louis; brothers and friends from the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, including their novices and novice master; and other Adrian Dominican Sisters.

Sister Donna Markham, OP, Prioress of the Congregation, formally received Sister Xiomara

into the novitiate to begin a two-year period of discernment.

The Rite of Reception concluded with the Dominican Blessing, and the celebration continued into the evening with dinner and a reception. ☺



Sister Xiomara, center, with Sister Ellen Burkhardt, left, Director of Formation, and her aunt, Sabina Hernández.

## Sister Judith Benkert Leads Mission to Work with Midwives of Guatemala

Shortly after her March 14 election as Chapter Prioress of the Dominican West Mission Chapter, Sister Judith Benkert, OP, was on the way to Guatemala, where she spent the next two weeks working with local midwives and meeting with more than 90 women in various stages of pregnancy.

Sister Judith, a faculty member of the Master's Program for the Certified Nurse-Midwifery Education Program at the University of California San Francisco (USCF) School of Medicine, was on her annual two-week mission with five second-year midwife nursing students and a colleague, Dr. Amy Levi, RNC, Ph.D., director of the Nurse-Midwifery Program.

Today's certified nurse-midwives offer the traditional support and personal human touch to the childbirth process that has benefited women since ancient times. Through the two-year USCF program, nursing students receive a Master's of Science degree, with certification in nurse-midwifery.

In the course of her work with the midwife nursing students, Sister Judith discovered that they were interested in serving in international health. As a result, the USCF midwife program teamed up with another certified nurse-midwife group. They provide four visits per year to communities in rural Guatemala and are able to keep records of the women they serve.

During their time in Guatemala, the USCF team was based at the

Parroquia (Parish) of San Lucas Toliman Parish on Lake Atitlan, in the highlands of southern Guatemala. Sponsored for the past 41 years by the Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota, and pastored by Father Gregory Schaffer, San Lucas works with groups or individual volunteers to help

the medical needs of the women in rural Guatemala. "We ... were able to see over 90 women in various stages of pregnancy," Sister Judith wrote in an e-mail. "We diagnosed twins and arranged for some women to get the needed sonograms through the parish clinic."



Midwifery students from the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine show off their new hair wraps, so popular among indigenous women in Guatemala. Shown from left to right are students Natzin, Serena, Amanda and Rebecca.


them experience the Mayan culture and to work with the Guatemalan people. The parish offers special programs for medical groups who come to volunteer.

Sister Judith emphasized the picturesque beauty of rural Guatemala. "Colors abound, as does the extreme poverty of the indigenous peoples," she wrote. The indigenous people of rural Guatemala face such difficulties as lack of education and employment opportunities; a high percentage of people live below the national poverty level; and health problems related to poverty, including malnutrition, tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases.

Sister Judith's group focused on

Sister Judith felt their most important accomplishment during this mission was meeting with the comadromas, traditional midwives, discussing complications after birth. "The discussion was lively," she said, though it had to be translated from the Spanish spoken by the USCF team to the comadromas' primary language, Ketichel. The women shared lunch and, through a spokesperson, the

comadromas asked for equipment they needed in their deliveries – "something as simple as a head lamp and some pincers to help them when they sterilize umbilical tapes."

Sister Judith has great respect for the comadromas. "These women hold the health of the small communities in their hands," she explained. "They are respected by their communities but rather shunned" by the official medical personnel. The students' work strengthens their desire to serve women and their babies. "We came home humbled and more committed than ever to support normal birth whenever and wherever possible," Sister Judith concluded. 

## “Women & Spirit” Exhibit Explores History and Contributions of U.S. Women Religious

Because of their dedication to the mission of Christ and their readiness to serve where there’s a great need, women religious have made great contributions to the Church and society in the United States. They have reached out to thousands of immigrants, nursed wounded soldiers fighting for both sides of the Civil War, cared for people dying of contagious diseases, built up and operated the largest private school system in the world, shed blood for the causes of justice and peace. Today, they continue to care for one in six hospital patients and work with dedication for causes of justice and peace.

Sister Barbara Cervenka, OP, Associate Professor of Art at Siena Heights University, served on a committee with other U.S. women religious. Their creativity and dedication demonstrate that the spirit of those women continues today. For the past four years, they have worked to bring about a unique exhibit showcasing the contributions of Catholic Sisters in the United States over the past 300 years. “Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America,” uses educational materials assembled from 400 religious communities to tell the story of their foremothers.

“Women & Spirit” opened on May 16, 2009 at the Cincinnati History Museum South Gallery and will remain there until August 30. The tentative schedule for the next three years is as follows:

- September to December, 2009: The Women’s Museum in Dallas, Texas.
- January to April, 2010: The S. Dillon Ripley Center at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC.
- September to December, 2010: Ellis Island Immigration Museum, Liberty Island, New York.
- February to April, 2011: The Mississippi River Museum in Dubuque, Iowa.

Sister Barbara said the purpose of the exhibit was to “tell the story of the contributions of Catholic Sisters.” A kiosk lists some 600 congregations of Sisters who have been active in the United States.

Sister Barbara became involved in the project four years ago at the request of Sister Helen Garvey, who was looking for sisters with a variety of backgrounds to help plan the exhibit. The original plan was to design an exhibit for the Smithsonian Institute, but officials there “weren’t encouraging.” The project would take a lot of funding and upcoming renovations could cause problems. Still, they assigned a curator to work with the committee. After a meeting of museum personnel, historians, archivists and the committee, the group became “quite enthusiastic” about the project. In the end, in spite of previous objections, the committee raised the money for the exhibit through donations by large congregations, the Hilton Foundation, and healthcare systems.

“It was touch and go,” Sister Barbara said, but it was also “a wonderful learning experience.” She especially relished the people




Several Adrian Dominican Sisters travelled to Cincinnati for the opening of the exhibit.

she worked with, including the committee and Nancy Seruto of Seruto and Company, who designed the exhibit.

Adrian Dominican Sisters have special reasons to be proud of this impressive exhibit. Among the wealth of artifacts on display are a few from the Adrian Dominican Congregation: the callboard from St. Clement’s Infirmary in Adrian and a book about the contributions of Sister Miriam Stimson, OP, to the discovery of DNA. The 6,000-square foot exhibit also includes audio-visual media, photographs and interactive kiosks.

“The project was a lot of work, but it was worth it,” Sister Barbara said.

For details on “Women & Spirit” and to keep abreast of the exhibition schedule, log on to [www.womenandspirit.org](http://www.womenandspirit.org). 



Sister Barbara Mary Saynay, OP

### Correction

The 2009 Jubilee announcement in the Spring, 2009 issue of *Voices* included a picture of Sister Mary Saynay. The picture should have been of Sister Barbara Mary Saynay. Our apologies for this mistake.

**Sister M. Rose Gundlfinger**  
**1871–1897**

– by Sister Catherine Podvin, OP

In 1892, Sister M. Rose Gundlfinger was the first to receive the habit in the new province that the New York Dominican Sisters established in Washington State under the title of St. Rose. St. Rose Province grew into the independent Congregation of the Holy Cross based in Everett and, later, in Edmonds, Washington. In 2003, they merged with the Adrian Dominican Sisters.

There are few records extant for Sister Rose. She was born on July 29, 1871, in Bavaria, Germany. We have no record of her secular name, her parents' names, the number of her siblings, when she came to America, or where her family settled. We do know, however, that she entered Holy Rosary Convent on Second Street in New York City on June 5, 1891, a little more than a month before her twentieth birthday.

Sent to Aberdeen, Washington, as a postulant, she received the habit in May 1892. Since the Archbishop of New York had decreed that sisters must make a two-year novitiate, the Washington sisters also followed that stipulation. Sister Rose professed her first vows on May 26, 1894.

Sister Rose was a fervent religious, simple, faithful to prayer, and zealous for God's honor and glory. She must have been very artistic, also. While at the hospital, she decorated the altar with flowers and plants that she had grown, created a grotto on the grounds, and fashioned a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes from plaster of Paris that she had found around the hospital. She also made a statue of St. Joseph that was placed in a niche near the hospital tower.

When Holy Rosary Convent in Chehalis opened in 1895, Sister Rose was assigned there as cook and housekeeper. Although she was not physically strong, she was used to working a good deal of time outdoors, tending to growing things. Her work at Holy Rosary Convent kept her indoors most of the time, and she became ill. Doctors eventually diagnosed tuberculosis. A severe hemorrhage that she suffered on Ascension Thursday in 1896 began a period of rapid deterioration in her health.

During her illness, she was considered a model of patience. Up until two weeks before her death, she attended daily Mass and followed the community exercises. When she died at 6:00 a.m. on March 12, 1897, the hour of the community Mass, the Mass was offered for the repose of her soul. She was four months short of her twenty-sixth birthday.

Her body was interred in the vault on the hospital grounds. Later, her remains were transferred to the sisters' plot in the Everett cemetery.

Her name is now listed in our Anniversarium, and we pray for her yearly.



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