



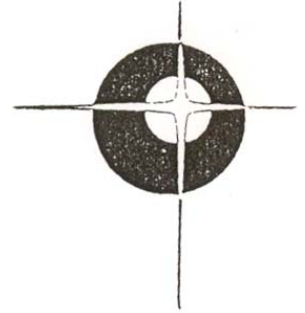
**“I have called you by name; you are mine.”
--Isaiah 43:1**

SISTER MARY AGNES OBERHOFER, SSND

January 1, 1912

April 1, 1938

October 10, 2008



Early Friday morning, October 10, our beloved Sister Mary Agnes Oberhofer, 96, died at Good Counsel Provincial House, Mankato, Minnesota. A 2008 Gold and Ruby Jubilarian, Sister Mary Agnes had desired to live in God’s eternal presence for a long time, and this desire is now fulfilled.

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Agnes, with Father Peter Nosbush as presider, will be on October 14 at 10:30 a.m. The vigil service is at 7:00 p.m. the preceding evening. Following the Liturgy, burial will take place in our cemetery. Loving sympathy to her sisters, Katarina (Ludwig) Sänftl and Elisabeth Oberhofer, nieces and nephews, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, as well as friends and colleagues. She was preceded in death by her parents Alois and Magdalen (Gangkofner) Oberhofer, three sisters (who belonged to three different Franciscan orders) Therese – Sister Othilda, OSF; Magdalen – Sister Othilda, OSF; and Marie – Sister Nazaria, OSF; and brother Xavier, as well as three brothers who died as infants.

Sister Mary Agnes, the seventh child, was born on New Years Day, 1912 in Wochenreit, Germany. Immediately after birth, she received conditional baptism; because of her small size, she was not expected to live. In her autobiography she noted, “But my mother, full of confidence in God, consecrated me to the Lord, if my life would be spared.” Later she was baptized in her parish church and given the name Anna. Her father farmed and her mother took care of the house and family.

She wrote of her early life, “At the age of six, I attended Catholic School in Lichtenhaag. We had lay teachers and weekly religious instructions from a priest. I helped my parents work on their farm and enjoyed a happy life in the family circle.”

Sister Mary Agnes described her vocation in this way: “I had often gone to visit my aunt and uncle at Vilsbiburg, a mission of our sisters, and got acquainted with the sisters there. The superior made application for me to the Munich Motherhouse. At the age of 17 (1929) I entered the SSND candidature in Munich-Au. After three years of training, especially in needlework, I made my state examination and qualified as a needlework teacher.”

Shortly after this, she was missioned to Pleystein, the home of Bishop Wittman. In 1937, after five years there, she applied for Reception, indicating that she was willing to go to a foreign country because sisters had been dismissed from German schools by the government. She was hoping to go to Brazil. In all, 17 candidates volunteered to go to Brazil, so a special ceremony of Reception into the novitiate was held on March 31 for them. After Reception, half the class was sent to the novitiate in Breslau and the rest, including Sister Mary Agnes, went to the Brede convent in Westphalia.

During their novitiate, the group became enthusiastic about the prospect of going to Brazil. However, Mother Mary Almeda made a special visitation to the novices to tell them that they would be going to North America instead because the North American commisary, Mother Medulpha, had asked repeatedly for sisters. The group, though disappointed, saw God’s will in this decision. In a letter that describes the precarious situation of the German sisters in 1938, Mother Almeda wrote, “On the 21st of April [16 newly professed sisters] will emigrate to North America where they will accept their

assignments in the vast mission field of our sisters there.” Mother Almeda met individually with each sister and told Sister Mary Agnes about her assignment to Mankato, “You will feel at home with the sisters of the Northwest Province since they have a very good spirit.”

Sister Mary Agnes remembered her voyage, “April 21st we left Munich for Bremen, where we boarded the ship Columbus, bound for New York. It was a great risk since we had not been told that we would ever come back. We were very lucky to have three young priests on the trip. None of us got seasick. We spent most of our time on deck enjoying the blue skies, beautiful sunsets, and the waves. Nights were scary for me because I had the feeling of going down. On the 28th of April we arrived in New York, where we were met by Mother Medulpha and Sister Placidia.” They spent several days in Notch Cliff, Maryland, and then she, Sister Josepha Forster and Sister Monhildis Mayr (who returned to Germany in 1957) took the train to Mankato, arriving late on May 5th.

Sister Mary Agnes continued, “Without a doubt there were adjustments to be made -- language, food, homesickness. One of the first Sundays I wrote to my Novice Mistress, ‘If the ocean were not so wide, I would like to jump across.’ Afterwards, I was sorry that I wrote that. But soon this loneliness was offset by English lessons, needlework, and getting acquainted with a new land, and it was a busy two years.”

She described her only mission experience off Good Counsel Hill, “One day [in 1940] Mother Andrina called me, asking me to go to St. Agnes and help Sister Robertine Lamm teach sewing in high school. Here I had many experiences. Before long, Sister Robertine took sick, and there I was alone – about 80 girls took sewing – four classes a day. Eager to learn more English, I picked up slang, too. As I came back to the Motherhouse after one year, Mother Andrina corrected me kindly with a smile.”

On April 1, 1941, she and Sister Josepha privately renewed their vows for three months, and then renewed them for another three years in the summer with the rest of her class. In 1944, she professed Final Vows and became a United States citizen.

The U.S. entry into World War II presented special problems for the German sisters. Communication with Germany was cut off; however, through the Red Cross they could send 25-word aerograms. Incoming and outgoing aerograms were held for six months before delivery, so Sister Mary Agnes only learned of the death of her father seven months after the fact.

In Mankato, she settled into the service that she so faithfully held for the rest of her active life – that of seamstress in the liturgical vestment department and sacristan. Using her needlework skills, she crafted many beautiful vestments, altar cloths and tablecloths, as well as smaller pieces in her 50 plus years as seamstress. She worked for many years with Sister M. Adelmara Zeller, another German immigrant. As sacristan, she was known for her exquisitely designed bouquets that adorned the sanctuary. She wrote, “I loved to cut flowers in the garden and greenhouse to decorate the altar.”

She treasured her several home visits to Germany which allowed her to spend time with her remaining family members. In 2005 she reflected on the deaths of her parents, sisters and brother, and concluded, “Of those of us who remain [she and two of her sisters], who will go home to God first? Each day is a grace.”

Sister Mary Agnes answered her own question, and she is now rejoicing with the God who called her by name throughout her 96 years.

Sister Mary Kay Ash