

Name: Sister Karen Anne Berger
Date of Birth: November 22, 1918
Place of Birth: Maribel, Wisconsin
Parents: Joseph A. and Anna (Spurney) Berger
Religious Profession: August 15, 1945
Date of Death: August 30, 2017
Age: 98
Years Professed: 72



Wake Reflection by Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director

Catherine Cecilia Berger was born on November 22, 1918 to Joseph A. and Anna (Spurney) Berger in Saint Wenceslaus Parish, Greenstreet, Manitowoc County, and was baptized on December 12, 1918. Catherine was confirmed on May 5, 1932 by the Most Reverend Paul P. Rhode, at St. Joseph Parish Church, Kellnersville, Wisconsin receiving the Confirmation name of Mary.

Catherine was the second youngest of nine children. She had four brothers and four sisters. She grew up on the family farm in rural Maribel, Wisconsin. After graduating from Maribel Grade School she went to live with her sister, Mary, and her husband. They lived on a farm about a mile from Reedsville so she could help with the children and the farm work and walk to Reedsville High School where she graduated in 1936.

Catherine had reddish hair and fair skin which didn't allow her to stay out in the sun very long. She had to always stay under a shelter when outside. This made a nursing profession appealing to her, since she would have an inside job. Doctor Carey, the Reedsville physician, knew of Catherine's desire to be a nurse and told her about the nursing school at Holy Family Hospital in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, which was not too expensive. She purchased three white nurses' uniforms for \$25.00 and entered the nursing program. She graduated in 1939 from Holy Family School of Nursing and continued working as a nurse at Holy Family Hospital for three years.

In 1942 many of the nursing school graduates were enlisting in the Service to use their talents for the good of the Country. Holy Family Hospital School of Nursing was granted approval for a U. S. Nursing Cadet Corps. Holy Family graduates who wished could be called to duty in various parts of the world. Catherine wanted to serve, but wasn't sure just how or where. The Sisters at the Hospital suggested that she talk to Father Jaekles, the Pastor at St. Paul Parish in Manitowoc where Catherine attended Mass frequently. After she explained her desire to help and serve others, Father Jaekles asked, "Why don't you try the Convent? I'll take you there for a visit!" When they visited the Convent they met Mother Perpetua who gave a short tour and gave her an entrance application. Father told her to fill it out which she did. Catherine told her Mother who was very supportive of her call as was her sister, Sister Karlene, who entered the Community six years earlier.

Catherine was accepted and entered Holy Family Convent on August 23, 1942 along with a young woman from St. Paul's Parish whom we know as Sister Martin Tours Jackl. On Reception Day, June 10, 1943 Catherine was given the name, Sister Karen Anne, Karen was Swedish for Catherine and Anne was her Mother's and Sister Karlene's Baptismal name.

After Sister Karen Anne completed her Novitiate she continued her nursing duties as a staff nurse, supervisor, instructor and assistant director in our hospitals, nursing and retirement homes and schools of nursing in Wisconsin, Ohio and Nebraska. During those years she attended Mercy College in Detroit and received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing in 1945. In 1960 Sister Karen Anne earned her Master's Degree in Nursing from De Paul University in Chicago. Sister Karen Anne lived through many changes in healthcare over the years and was always interested in what was happening in the field of nursing.

After retiring Sister Karen Anne received Missioning Assignments to visit the elderly at Sacred Heart Parish in Manitowoc and then at San Damiano Convent in Slinger. In 2003 she returned to the Motherhouse where she participated in tasks wherever she could and prayed for the Sisters and Staff of St. Rita Health Center. The Convent Exercise Room and the Health Clinic were very helpful to keep her independent and healthy.

Early in Religious Life Sister Karen Anne became interested in Pro-Life meetings and legislative efforts. She would contact legislators and organizations regarding pro-life and conservative issues. Sister belonged to the Heritage Foundation whose work is to educate legislators and the public about pertinent issues. Sister Karen Anne kept up to date by reading the daily newspaper and listening to news programs. There was always something more to learn. She had many interests and could carry on an informed conversation on any topic.

Sister Karen Anne remained active to the very end of her earthly life. In recent years she had more time available to her to spend in prayer, attend Scripture and Church History classes to help her spiritual life grow. At the time of her Jubilee she wrote, "Now in my retirement years I have more opportunities to consider and respond to the Lord's activities, His love, His presence among us, especially in the Eucharist, and our responsibilities as Women Religious. I have been called to follow Jesus more closely, and to pray. Prayer changes things. As has been said, 'more things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of.'" She was appreciative and blessed with a good long life, her family, friends and Sisters in Community. She treasured the friendship of her sister, Sister Karlene, and her cousin, Sister Kay Elmer. After Pope Francis was elected to lead the Church, she heard Bishop Ricken say that this was the "Franciscan moment." This gave Sister Karen Anne the motivation to be a better Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity!

Sister Karen Anne will be missed for her presence among us and her daily routines. May we all embrace her desire to live life fully and to grow into this "Franciscan Moment" in the life of the Church.

Eternal rest grant to Sister Karen Anne, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her.

May she rest in peace.

Amen.