

Name: Sister Marella Wagner
Date of Birth: March 6, 1938
Place of Birth: Cleveland, Wisconsin
Parents: Norbert John and Cecilia Regina (Knackert) Wagner
Religious Profession: August 15, 1956
Date of Death: June 27, 2020
Age: 82
Years Professed: 63



Reflection by Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director

Donna Mae Wagner was born March 6, 1938 at St. Nicholas Hospital in Sheboygan, Wisconsin to Norbert John and Cecilia Regina (Knachert) Wagner. Donna Mae was baptized at St. Wendel Church in Cleveland, Wisconsin on March 10, 1938 and Confirmed there on May 29, 1950 by the Most Rev. Bishop Grellinger.

Donna Mae grew up on the family farm in Cleveland with her parents and four siblings, two brothers, Jules and Roger, and two sisters who entered the Religious Congregation of School Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee, Sister Roseann and Sister Mary Jane. Donna Mae attended St. Wendel Elementary School where she met the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, who were her teachers. Growing up in a strong, German, Catholic family Donna Mae was inspired to become a Sister, like the ones who taught her.

In a letter dated July 10, 1951 she wrote the following letter to Mother Edna:

Dear Mother Edna,

I graduated from eighth grade at St. Wendel School this year and I would like to enter your high school in the fall. Please send me some literature concerning the life of your Sisters and their years of preparation at Holy Family Convent.

*Respectfully yours,
Donna Mae Wagner*

Within two weeks, Donna Mae returned her application papers. Her pastor, Rev. Lawrence M. Loerke sent his recommendation dated August 20, 1951 stating, "Donna Mae Wagner is a girl of fine character and I highly recommend her." Donna Mae entered Holy Family Convent on August 23, 1951 and completed her High School in Holy Family Academy in 1955. At the time of her Reception, June 13, 1955, she was given the name Sister Marella, a form of the name Mary, meaning "star of the sea/shining sea."

Sister Marella earned a Bachelor of Music degree from Silver Lake College of the Holy Family in 1966. At that time, she began serving as a full-time faculty member at the College. Continuing her education, she earned a Master of Music degree in 1969 from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Sister Marella held several leadership positions at the College including: Chair of the Faculty Development Committee,

Coordinator of the College's Division of Arts and Sciences and Chair of the Department of Music. She was a member of the International, National and Midwest Kodály Associations. Sister Marella has written about music for numerous publications and has studied and given presentations about music in various places in the United States and in other countries. Sister Marella also wrote several original pieces of music. In May 2015 Sister Marella was honored with Professor Emeritus status for the many years of dedication and academic leadership at the Silver Lake College of the Holy Family.

In a *Communigram* issue that featured Sister Marella, Sister Lorna commented, "Sister Marella's contributions to the SLC Music Department are invaluable. All that has been accomplished over the years never could have happened if she were not there. She brings insights to every endeavor and supports every worthwhile project with a quiet, but steady energy. God has gifted her greatly and she uses those gifts to the fullest."

Sister Marella commented in that same *Communigram* issue, "Through the years I have come to treasure the gift of music as a beautiful partner on the journey of life. Music speaks to our souls and for our souls, individually and communally, in liturgy, in concerts and in daily living. A mentor once commented, 'Music will survive without us. It is inherent in the human spirit to make music. The question we must ask is how best can we serve music so that it is able to express the best of the human spirit?' Sister Marella's personal mission was to serve music to the best of her ability, honoring and serving the gift of music. In doing this, honoring and serving the Lord, the Giver!" Sister Marella did complete that mission on Saturday night. She now has a viewpoint of what awaits each of us as we conclude our earthly journey.

At the time of her Jubilee Sister Marella wrote that "the years have brought a good amount of surprise and challenge, but they have also brought peace and satisfaction. For this reason, I sing for joy and with heartfelt gratitude to the Lord for His call to single-minded fidelity to Him and to building His Kingdom here on earth." Sister Marella went on to express deep gratitude for the daily gift of the Eucharist, faith-filled generous and dedicated Sisters, supportive family, colleagues and students. She continued, "So much of my life has revolved around making music and teaching music. That in itself is a wonderful gift, as music is soul-food. With overwhelming gratitude, I praise and thank God for all that has been. My hope for the future is that making music together will bring healing to all people and give praise and glory to God forever."

May Sister Marella intercede from her eternal resting place to continue to touch the lives of people to bring unity among the people of the world. Thank you, Sister Marella, for sharing your life, your gifts and talents with us as a Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity. May you enjoy your eternal life with Our Lord.