

Name: Sister Maria Casetta
Date of Birth: February 11, 1925
Place of Birth: Almon, Wisconsin
Parents: Lee William and Esther Clara (Paugel) Casetta
Religious Profession: August 15, 1943
Date of Death: October 26, 2020
Age: 95
Years Professed: 77



Reflection by Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director

Pearl Joyce Casetta was born in Almon, Wisconsin, in Shawano County, to Lee William and Esther Clara (Paugel) Casetta on February 11, 1925. Pearl's mother was raised Lutheran and her father was a non-practicing Catholic. Pearl was baptized two weeks after she was born, by a Lutheran Minister, in her Maternal Grandfather's farmhouse. Shortly after her baptism, the Casetta family moved to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The following year on March 1, 1926 Pearl's brother, Harold, was born. He was very tiny and could have fit in a cigar box. Since Pearl's father wanted his first son to be baptized Catholic, and Pearl's mother did not want two religions in one family, she decided to become a Catholic. Pearl's mother took the two children with her when she went for instructions. Pearl was one year old and would walk through the rectory and visit the housekeeper, who would give her graham crackers. While walking through the rooms, Pearl would eat the crackers, dump over the waste paper basket and make a mess on the floor. Her mother would get so nervous, because of Pearl's behavior, but Father would say, "Let her go. It will give the housekeeper something to do."

Pearl was baptized a Catholic on April 4, 1926 along with her brother, Harold, at St. Patrick's Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin by Rev. T. J. Cosgrove. Pearl made her First Holy Communion on July 23, 1933 and was confirmed on November 1, 1936.

Pearl went to the public school and loved attending Catechism classes on Saturdays. She learned about God and had a deep desire to learn more about him. When she was in seventh grade, she was able to attend St. Mary's Catholic School, where the Agnesian Sisters were her teachers. Her desire to be a Sister grew in her, as she grew fond of the Sisters. After eighth grade Pearl asked her parents to go to St. Joseph's School for ninth grade. This was a sacrifice for the family, because they did not belong to that parish, and they had to pay extra tuition. Pearl attended daily Mass and one morning asked Monsignor Riordan, the Pastor of St. Joseph's Parish, if he thought she would make a good Sister. He did think so. Now Pearl had to figure out where to go to become a Sister.

Ruth Brisbane, Sister Humilita's mother, was a good friend of Pearl's mother. Pearl and her mother visited Sister Humilita when she was home for a visit. Pearl got the address of Holy Family Convent and was ready to write her letter to request application papers. On February 4, 1939 she wrote:

Dear Mother M. Generose,

I am the girl Sister M. Humilita spoke to you about, who wishes to become a Nun. I am among the fortunate who has received an invitation from our Lord to become a Nun. I hope I can fulfill this invitation. I have prayed for a long time that this would be my vocation and now I am sure that our Lord wishes me to become a Nun. I know that being a Nun isn't all roses. There are some thorns, but there are in any state of life. We all have to bear a cross, if we don't, we cannot get any crown.

Mother Generose, would you please send me an application blank and also write to me soon?

Very truly yours,

Pearl Casetta

Pearl's mother told her to leave the letter by the telephone so her dad could read it before she sent it. Pearl's father and mother were not in favor of her going to the Convent, but it was her wish, so they gave their permission. Pearl was accepted and on August 20, 1939 Pearl came downstairs with her suitcase. Her dad asked her where she was going and she responded, "To the Convent." He asked, "Who is taking you?" Pearl answered, "You are." He said, "No I am not." About an hour later he got into the car and was ready to drive to Holy Family Convent with Pearl and her mother. Mother Generose welcomed Pearl and her mother. Pearl's father stayed in the car. When Pearl went to the car to say good bye she realized the full impact of her decision to enter the Convent. Her father and youngest brother came to the Convent two weeks later to see if she was all right. Pearl was all right and she had a big bag of candy bars to share after they left.

Pearl completed her High School in Holy Family Academy. On her Reception day, June 11, 1941, Pearl received the name Sister Maria in honor of the Blessed Mother, for whom she had a deep love. Sister Maria continued her education earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Holy Family College in 1958 with a Major in English and a Minor in History. After teaching primary grades for 21 years Sister Maria was Directress for the young women in Holy Family Academy for seven years. During those summers Sister Maria attended the College of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois earning a Master of Arts Degree in Theology in 1971 to help prepare her for ministry as Director of Religious Education. Sister Maria enjoyed seeing the Church grow with the children and parents for 20 years serving as DRE. Sister Maria's goal was to help the people, no matter the age, know Jesus and His great love for them. Sister Maria loved working with the people and building relationships within the parish, calling forth the giftedness of the parishioners to in turn serve one another.

In recent years Sister Maria is known and remembered for her ministry in St. Rita Health Center and at St. Francis Convent. At the time of her Jubilee Sister Maria reflected:

"Knowing that my short-term memory was failing me, I reflected on my Consecrated Life: Whatever God wants. That is what I vowed at my profession. I am where I am because this is where He wants me to be now, in St. Rita Health Center. God seems to want me to give up memories and that is OK, as they are His anyway. I am His bride and His servant. I want to please Him. I am grateful to Him for calling me to this Community, to be a Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity. It is and has been wonderful, amazing and so good to be alive and striving for union with my God as I abandon myself totally to Him, striving to do His Holy Will each day." Sister Maria continued, I am deeply grateful to God, my wonderful Community,

my precious, loving family, especially my parents, my four 'number 1' brothers, my sister and their families who have always supported me in my religious vocation."

As Sister Jessica reflected, "The best way to honor your memory, Sister Maria, is by following your example of kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness and loving joy. The nurse who was with Sister Maria when she was ending her earthly journey said that she and the CNA put Sister Maria's beautiful blue rosary in her hands and prayed some Hail Mary's with her. They were with Sister Maria, who was very peaceful, when she breathed her last breath. As Sister Maria heard echoed in her heart many times in her life, one more time I am sure she heard the Lord saying to her, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have called you by your name, and you are mine, My Maria!"

Sister Maria, thank you for being our Sister. Thank you for the ready, kind smile for every person you met. We ask you to intercede for Vocations for the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. May you rest in peace.