

**Sister Mary Antonia Ward**  
August 21, 1915 - May 21, 2011



When the pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Elwood, Indiana, Father Theo Hammes, wrote a letter in 1952 recommending Mary Ward to the Sisters of Charity, he actually created a description of her for the years before she entered and certainly for her 59 years as a member of our community. He wrote: “Mary has gained the respect of many, many men and women of this civic community by reason of her modesty, humility, gentleness, general ability, fine human relations. . . “

Modesty, humility and gentleness were the trademark virtues of Sister Mary Antonia. These characteristics endeared her first to her family. Her parents, Michael Ward and Teresa Rooney

Ward had six children, three boys, James, Thomas and Edward, and three girls, Anna, Margaret and the youngest, Mary. Today there are many nieces and nephews, grand nieces and nephews who loved Sister Mary Antonia. In her younger years she went to Indiana to visit and even during her long illness she thought of and spoke of her family, and I am sure prayed for all of you. She enjoyed receiving letters from anyone in the family. Two highlights in her life were connected to her family. One was a trip to Ireland in 1980 with her sister Anne and her family. The second was her attendance at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of her home parish, Saint Joseph, with Sister Marie Celine, a Sister of Mercy, who is also from Elwood, Indiana.

Many have asked during the last few days how Sister Mary Antonia got to our community from Elwood, Indiana. There is a letter she wrote to our Superior and Council in 1988 in which she tells the story:

You know that I was older when I entered. My brother Tom had his is bowling alley in the K of C Hotel in Gary, Indiana. Mr. Coyle, Sister Barbara Coyle’s brother, was manager of the hotel. I kept in touch with Sister Barbara until the death of my mother January 29, 1951. (She explains here that January 29 is also the death anniversary of Sister Mary Antonia Donohue who died January 29, 1925, the same date as her mother and that is the reason she chose the name Sister Mary Antonia. Then she goes on to say that she kept in touch with Sister Barbara and in the spring of 1952) I visited Sister Barbara. Sisters met me at the station after Saturday school. I was served in the parlor for meals; Sunday we went to Seton Hill to see Mother Claudia (Glenn) and Sister Miriam Fidelis (Guinagh). They decided I would enter July 1 (1952). I considered this was our Lord’s plan and I followed.

As of today ( in 1988), I am thankful for doing so. I did not achieve this on my own. My father told me, ‘I have placed you in the hands of our Blessed Lady.’ Our Blessed Lady, my family, friends and all the Sisters of Charity, also Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton have been my inspiration. As I grow in years I try to be more grateful for my calling as a religious.

Sister Mary Antonia worked as a secretary in a doctor’s office in Elwood for ten years before she entered and then took care of her mother until her mother’s death. Interestingly enough, when Sister Mary Antonia entered on July 1, 1952, she met another young

woman, Sister Rebecca Ann Espinosa, who had entered March 25, 1952, and who was also “older when she entered.” The rest of our group came on September 8 and were quite a bit younger. But Sister Rebecca Ann and Sister Mary Antonia fit right in. In her gentle, modest way Sister Mary Antonia did everything she was asked to do, and went along with the rest of the group in the many things we did throughout the years. She would smile her brilliant smile and say, in her mellow voice, “Yes, that will be all right.”

When our group went out to teach, Sister Mary Antonia went too, teaching first and second grade for 20 years, then taking charge of a learning center for four years. She taught in Pittsburgh, Altoona, Glyndon, Maryland, Greensburg, Johnstown. When our group made first vows, most of us were sent to Arizona, and Sister Mary Antonia went to Saint John’s, Tucson, where she spent four years.

After nearly 25 years teaching, Sister Mary Antonia moved into parish visiting at Holy Innocents in the Sheraden area of Pittsburgh. She loved this ministry. She helped with Meals on Wheels, but mostly she would walk all through Sheraden, visiting elderly parishioners. She wrote to a member of the Council:

I enjoy the conversations with the elderly. Each year there are new members to visit and others I often recall who are now with our Redeemer.

When I go to the homes, some serve refreshments, which I always enjoy. I never refuse.

I always call ahead to set up a time to come. Sometimes the people say they cannot see me at that time and they will call back. Only two or three have ever called back.

But I have a sufficient number and we seem to enjoy each other’s company.

Then she adds: Sister, I smile while I write to you.

Last evening one of the Sisters remarked that the gentle Sister Mary Antonia never spoke unkindly of others. She was prayerful and grateful for her vocation.

In one copy of her plans for her funeral Mass, Sister Mary Antonia requested a reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians. These words can serve this evening as a farewell from Sister Mary Antonia to all of us:

Finally, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you . . . All the holy ones greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with you.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection  
-Sister Brigid Marie Grandey  
May 24, 2011*