



Sister Margaret Van Rossem, SSND
August 7, 1933 – June 4, 2019



Wilton, Connecticut – Sister Margaret Van Rossem, SSND, died peacefully on June 4, 2019, at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, Connecticut. She was a vowed member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for 64 years. She ministered as an educator for nearly 20 years in Annapolis and Baltimore, Maryland, before returning to her birthplace of South Ozone Park, New York and ministering at St. Anthony of Padua School for nearly 30 years.

The sixth of seven children born to Henry and Mary Catherine (Keogan) Van Rossem, in South Ozone Park, New York, on August 7, 1933, Agnes Mary was baptized at St. Clement's Church on August 27. Four brothers and two sisters (one of whom became our Sister Julia Mary) completed this devout Catholic family.

Agnes attended St. Clement's School with the Sisters of St. Dominic from first to eighth grade, received First Communion in 1940, and was confirmed by Bishop Molloy at the age of 11. She wrote in her brief autobiography on entering the novitiate, that "As far back as I can remember, I had always had the desire to become a sister."

At John Adams High School, Agnes graduated in June 1951. Agnes later went to work at the New York Life Insurance Company on Madison Avenue in Manhattan. Agnes and Julia often went to Mass at St. Anthony of Padua. The pastor put her in touch with Sister Mary Alphonso, at St. Rita's in Brooklyn. Agnes then made a novena to the Blessed Mother and at the end felt sure that she would enter the convent. She "felt that God and his Blessed Mother had work for me to do as a School Sister of Notre Dame." On August 27, 1952, she received the bonnet at St. Anthony's Parish Church in South Ozone Park.

At the Baltimore Motherhouse, Agnes studied in the Normal School for more than a year; then, during her second year of candidature, she taught Kindergarten at St. Margaret School in Bel Air, Maryland. At Reception on July 17, 1954, she received the name

Margaret and made first profession on August 1, 1955. Final vows followed on the same day in 1961. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1966 from the College of Notre Dame of Maryland (now Notre Dame of Maryland University).

From 1957 to 1975, Margaret lived the life of a typical SSND: she taught at St. Mary, Annapolis, St. Ambrose and St. Brigid in Baltimore, was assistant to Administration at the Institute of Notre Dame, and taught at Bishop John Neumann School. In 1976, her next mission, of 26 years, brought her back to the place of her birth, South Ozone Park, as a teacher at St. Anthony of Padua School, which had been founded in 1952 to educate the children of Italian immigrants. In 1996 she was listed as semi-retired there, but until 2002 she was also listed as a teacher, sacristan, and assistant to the Pre-School Director.

Her sister, Julia Mary, became Principal in 1976. A 1993 headline about the school in *The Wilton Current* reads “Family Spirit Radiates in NY Inner City School.” Four teachers and two secretaries also grew up in South Ozone Park. Margaret is pictured smiling with a diverse group of Kindergartners proudly wearing their St. Anthony School sweat suits. They are largely Black and Hispanic children. When asked what made the school special, the students said, “The teachers. They help you out. They say, ‘Come, if you need more help.’ They make learning fun.”

The sisters came to the motherhouse in Wilton together in 2002. Margaret found a perfect niche—assisting the local leaders in myriad tasks. She did many other large and small tasks with her gentle smile and gracious way. Only recently did Margaret confide that she always tried to treat everyone as if they were Christ.

On June 8, the eve of Pentecost, a Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Margaret Van Rossem was celebrated at Villa Notre Dame, Wilton; she was then laid to rest in the community cemetery at St. Mary Parish, Bethel, Connecticut. The liturgy celebrated what all who knew Margaret agreed to – that she embodied the Gifts of the Spirit that we ponder and pray for every year on the 50th day after Easter: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, benignity, long suffering, mildness.

Margaret’s nephews and nieces joined the VND community for the wake service presided over by Sister John Vianney Zullo on June 7. Two of them spoke fondly of her. The funeral liturgy ended with “Our Lady of Knock,” Margaret’s favorite hymn. Memorial contributions may be made to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic Midwest Province, c/o Development Office, 345 Belden Hill Road, Wilton, Conn. 06897 or online: www.amssnd.org

