

## Life and Death of

### Sister Gertrud Marie Wolfer, OSB

who died on February 1, 2008  
in Norfolk, Nebraska, USA

*Now, Master, you can let your servant  
go in P E A C E!*



Quietly and unobtrusively as she had lived, our dear Sister Gertrud Marie died, her soul leaving her body at 3:50 pm on First Friday, February 1, as we sisters were adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament next to her apartment. How often in her long life she had taken two periods of adoration to honor the Sacred Heart of Jesus!

Sister Gertrud Marie was born in the beautiful old city of Speyer on the Rhine on May 28, 1914, youngest of the three children of Hermann Wolfer and his wife Josepha Tremmel. In baptism at the cathedral on June 1, she received the names of three saints: Gertrud, Maria, and Barbara. Her brother died as an infant, her sister Maria Caecilie Wolfer, M.D., in 1982.

Both girls attended elementary and girls' secondary school with the Dominican Sisters in Speyer. There, Gertrud had Edith Stein as her teacher of literature and writing during her last year, 1931-1932. All her life, she counted this fact as a great grace. After graduation, Gertrud took a one-year business course and then six months of x-ray training in Munich. At age 20, in 1934, she entered the motherhouse of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters at Tutzing in Bavaria, received the name of Sr. Osgitha in January 1936, and made first profession on January 9, 1937. On July 11 of the same year, together with Sr. Maria Lucas Rauch, she traveled by ship to New York and on to Raeville, Nebraska, by train. Hitler's oppression of international religious congregations had already begun, and the superiors were sending out many young sisters, as well as novices and postulants while this was possible, though with minimal preparation. Sr. Osgitha was told that the sisters would teach her English in America; she had studied some French and English in secondary school.

After a year of English language studies with Sr. Iniga at the Raeville High School and in Sacred Heart Hospital at Lynch, Sr. Osgitha was accepted for nurse's training at St. Joseph Hospital in Omaha in 1938. She recalled renewing her vows in her bedroom at the school of nursing in January 1940, making final profession on June 25, 1940, in Raeville (shortly before the priory was transferred to Norfolk). She only could take her stateboards after becoming a citizen, and with further study, she became a registered nurse in March of 1944. In 1945 she spent a year at Peoria near Chicago to become a nurse anesthetist. This was followed by assignment to Holy Trinity Hospital in Graceville, Minnesota, where she served faithfully for 28 years (1946-1974). Her many talents enabled her to do many kinds of work—bookkeeping, general nursing, operating room, maternity, emergency, x-ray, laboratory, as nurse anesthetist, organist, and increasingly in pastoral care for patients and families for which she had a special gift. Another unique skill of Sr. Osgitha's was locating the veins for injections. Even doctors would call for her in difficult cases.

In 1974, after Vatican II, Sr. Osgitha resumed her baptismal name, and after a six-month course in clinical pastoral care at Immanuel Medical Center in Omaha, she was assigned to Providence Medical Center in Wayne, Nebraska. Again, she served for a long time, 26 years (1975-2001), becoming very well known and loved as Sr. Gertrud Marie in the hospital, and after 1983 as full-time pastoral minister visiting also patients in the nursing homes and in their houses. Grateful patients and co-workers loved Sr. Gertrud Marie, and she received many citations and awards for her services.

All her busy years of health care, Sr. Gertrud Marie also gave a great example of deep prayer. Both sisters and lay helpers often found her quietly in chapel, drawing amazing strength and resilience from her talks with the Lord, as well as the right word for troubled patients and families in emergencies.

After 2001, during her last years in Norfolk, Sr. Gertrud Marie still played the organ for the Divine Office and worked part-time in the laundry. Though needing hearing aids since 1985 and surgery for colon cancer in 2000, she maintained her health, taking daily walks around the monastery in all kinds of weather. As her strength waned during the final months of her life, Sr. Gertrud Marie received total care and spoke rarely, sleeping much of the time.

Sr. Gertrud Marie had enjoyed home visits in 1968, 1974, 1979, 1987, and 2002. Taking part in the beatification of her teacher Edith Stein [Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross] on May 2, 1987 in Cologne and her canonization on Oct. 11, 1998 in Rome were moments of special grace for her.

She faithfully read the diocesan newspaper of Speyer, *The Pilgrim*, sharing especially good articles with other sisters. In 1984 she benefited greatly, as she said, from a 30-day retreat at the Minneapolis Cenacle. The sisters living in the small communities with Sr. Gertrud Marie noted a gradual mellowing of her personality over the years. She was resolute, rather strong-willed, at times stubborn. Though small and seemingly frail, she was remarkably resilient. No walk was too much for her in emergencies. We knew her as a quiet, neat, dignified, and prayerful sister and enjoyed her occasional dry humor.

The rosary and wake for Sr. Gertrud Marie were held at the Johnson-Stonacek Funeral Home and the funeral Mass at St. Mary's Church in Norfolk, followed by graveside prayer at Prospect Hill Cemetery.

We Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Norfolk Priory commend our Sister Gertrud Marie Wolfer to the prayer of all our sisters and friends.

*May she rest in peace.*