Sister Louise (Mary Alexander) Borgacz, OP  
(1934 – 2014)

Sister Louise, formerly known as Sister Mary Alexander, was born on May 13, 1934, in Detroit, to Alexander and Marion (Janeczko) Borgacz. In 1951, Louise graduated from New Haven High School in New Haven, Michigan, and three years later entered the postulate in Adrian.

After making first profession in 1955, Sister Louise was assigned to teach elementary grades at St. Mary and St. Joseph School in Iron Mountain, Michigan, for five years. During the summer she studied at Siena Heights College (now University) and received a bachelor’s degree in secretarial science in 1959.

From 1960 to 1972, Sister Louise taught in the following high schools: Aquinas in Chicago, for five years; Holy Cross in Santa Cruz, California, for one year; Adrian Catholic Central in Adrian, Michigan, for one year; and St. Martin De Porres in Detroit for four years, three of these years as assistant principal. During this period, Sister Louise studied during the summers at the University of Detroit and received a master’s degree in business education in 1967.

The 1960’s was a period of social, cultural, and political unrest and change. Even the language in Vatican II documents reflected a major shift in the Church’s core values. It was during this period that many congregations of women religious had a new awareness of social responsibility and accountability. In 1973, Sister Louise, while working at the Congregation’s finance office, accepted an invitation from Sister Rosemary Ferguson and her General Council to serve as a member of the 1974 General Chapter steering committee. In her letter of acceptance, Louise wrote:

_During these history-making days it is my firm belief that religious women must be on the cutting edge of the Church, not only because of the Gospel message but because of the unique position we hold. As Dominicans, as Adrian Dominicans, we have a history of courage, daring, dedication and holiness. Not resting on our laurels we must continue the great work that was begun by Dominic and carried out by his/our brothers and sisters._

Two years after the Episcopalians filed their first resolution against apartheid in South Africa, the General Council asked Louise to explore the relationship between Church as investor and as proclaimer of the Gospel. This eventually resulted in the Congregation’s written policy statement and criteria for investments, and the establishment of the Portfolio Advisory Board (PAB).

By 1974, the Congregation had moved from investigation to action. In February, Louise wrote to all corporations in which the congregation owned stock, and requested that they send information on their policies about:

- fair employment practices, both domestic and foreign; attention to ecological balance and pollution-controls; efforts to concentrate on peacetime as contrasted with military operation;
- improvement of the quality of life of employees by alleviating poverty and combating racism; and procedures to allow consumer groups a voice in corporation affairs.
By 1975, Sister Louise was serving on the Board of Directors of the National Catholic Coalition for Responsible Investment (NCCRI). At that time the NCCRI was sponsored by seven groups of men and women religious, among them the Leadership Council of Women Religious (LCWR).

When Sister Louise left the Finance Office in August 1975, she returned to serve in various roles in education. She was principal of Aquinas High School in Chicago for four years. Following one year as assistant principal of Servite High School in Detroit, she accepted a position at Mercy High School in Farmington Hills, Michigan, as business manager. She held this position for six years.

In 1987, Sister Louise applied for and received a one-year ministerial sabbatical at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago to expand and enrich her understanding of Scripture and Spirituality. During this transition period she wrote:

With trying to close up my office at Mercy High School, moving to Chicago, and then going back to Farmington Hills to try to help train my replacement whose first day on the job was July 13, I’m not so sure that I have everything together.

After her year of study, Louise accepted the position of financial assistant at Fenwick High School in Oak Park, Illinois. She served in this position for the next ten years.

In 1998, Sister Louise returned to Adrian to serve as assistant to the Secretary of the Congregation for four years. In her Annals, she wrote, “Coming back to work at the Motherhouse and living in Adrian has been a wonderful life-giving experience. The whole atmosphere is so accepting; the natural beauty of the area provides food for the soul.”

Sister Louise retired in 2002 and in her Annals wrote this entry, “Retirement has given me an opportunity to read, study, pray in a way that has not been possible while engaged in active, full-time ministry.”

Her first ten years of retirement, however, were interrupted twice when she served four and a half years as administrative assistant to the Dominican Midwest Chapter Office, and volunteered to be the accountant at the Aquinas Literacy Center in Chicago for two years.

By 2010, her health was becoming increasingly fragile and on November 2, 2014, Sister Louise Borgacz died at the age of eighty; it was the sixtieth year of her religious profession.

Sister Kathleen Klingen, Chapter Prioress of the Dominican Midwest Chapter, shared the following remembrance during the wake service:

I first met Sister Mary Alexander at Aquinas High School when I was assigned to her homeroom. Sister taught the juniors basic bookkeeping, but she opened our hearts to the deep love of God when she taught Religion. Louise not only conveyed the lesson plan, but from her heart, the message of God’s faithful presence. I never had a teacher well up with tears the way Louise did when she spoke to us of God’s deep love and goodness.
Sister Therese Haggerty shared the following remembrance:

I worked with Sister Louise in the Office of Information beginning in 1998. When Lou and I first met we both just “clicked” and I knew our relationship was going to be long term. What I liked about Louise was she was very direct. I never had to guess what she meant; she said it outright. She was very kind and caring to everyone. When Lou came in to Adrian after she had moved to Chicago she always had a visit with her dear friends. It was a privilege to be with Louise when she died.

Sister Therese DeCanio described her friend and companion as a “risk taker.” She said, “Louise was always willing to take on new challenges for the Congregation. Her ability to say YES has always challenged and inspired me.”

Sister Louise’s brother David recalled his teen-age years working on the family farm with Lou. He remembered how awe-struck he was on his first visit to the motherhouse campus and the great conversations he had with his sister during those visits.

Sister Rose Celeste O’Connell recalled the three years Sister Louise worked in the Information Service Office as her executive assistant. “She loved to talk, enjoyed office parties and was always three steps ahead of us in keeping up with the work. Louise loved her family and was a woman of deep faith.”

Father Jim Hug, SJ, began his homily by asking everyone to imagine what it must have been like for the disciples, after Jesus was gone, to make sense of His words to them: “I am the Way, the Truth, the Life.”

Now this is the challenge and opportunity facing family and friends of Louise. As the memories and reflections of the disciples eventually shaped the Gospel story so our memories and reflections of Louise shape her story and how it changed ours. Let me reflect back to you some of what I’ve heard during these days [of remembrances].”

Louise’s Way: kind, sensitive, loving, prayerful, pervasive sense of God present among us, and staunchly Polish.

Louise’s Truth: thorough preparation like Jesus with the disciples... A good educator, demanding high expectations and strong support. Organized and hard working.

Louise’s Life: her witness to God’s love for all. Human Dignity, Option for the poor. Deep personal sense of the impact of poverty and racism.

Thank you, Louise. And thank you, God, for revealing Your Way, Your Truth, and Your Life.