Sister Leona King, OP  
(1930 – 2014)

As Sister Frances Nadolny, Sister Leona’s Chapter Prioress, reminded those attending Sister’s wake, the name “Leona” is a feminine form of “Leo,” which means “lion,” and “Leona” means “lioness.” The lioness cares for and protects the ones she loves, as Sister Leona’s life exemplifies. She wrote that she based her life and all that she did on the Beatitudes and Corporal Works of Mercy.

On January 24, 1930, Edward Adrian and Leona Agnes (Clemens) King of Detroit welcomed a daughter into their family. In baptism their infant daughter received the same name as that of her mother, Leona Agnes. She was one of their six children, four boys and two girls. In her autobiography she does not mention her place in the family or the names of her siblings.

The Kings lived in St. David Parish, and all of their children attended St. David Elementary School, which was a co-ed school. St. David High School was only for girls, and Leona and her sister both continued their education there. Her brothers, however, had to travel to De La Salle and St. Joseph High Schools. She mentioned only two of them as high school students.

Edward King worked at Cadillac Motor Company, but he lost his job during the Depression. She wrote that “he was lucky enough to find a job at Chrysler,” which took him on the road a lot, but he would phone and write frequent letters to his wife and family. There also was another change. Leona’s grandmother was living with the Kings, and when two of her aunts lost their homes they were invited also. She wrote, “My one aunt had four children and the other aunt had one child, so we had a full house.” The children did have a lot of fun. “We made our own fun.”

Toward the end of the Depression, Edward King lost his job at Chrysler and took a job helping the janitor at St. David School. He sometimes worked late, repairing the school desks and doing other work at the convent, and the sisters would give him cookies and milk. “They would tell him to shut the door and make sure it was locked.” It is obvious that they considered him a very trustworthy person. The pastor told him that if he needed anything for his home or family, “to put it on the parish bill.” The Kings later paid back to the parish the money that had been used for their assistance during this time.

When Leona graduated from St. David High School in 1947, she talked to her pastor about entering the Adrian Dominicans. He advised her to write to Mother Gerald Barry, which she did. After thinking over the information that she had received, and working for a few months, she finally entered the Adrian postulate on February 2, 1948. She wrote, “We had lots of fun in the novitiate, and the girls today don’t know what it was like. We have all these memories to share.”

On August 10, 1948, she and her group received the habit and their religious names. Until the 1970s Leona was known as Sister John William. On August 11, 1949, the group professed their first vows.
For nine years after profession, Sister Leona was assigned to teach on the elementary level. Her first appointment sent her to Chicago as a second grade teacher at St. Kilian School for a year. Brought back to Michigan, she was sent to the Upper Peninsula where she taught in the primary and middle grades at St. Agnes School in Iron River for the next five years. In 1955, she again taught primary children at St. Alphonsus School in Deerfield.

During the summers, Sister Leona studied at Siena Heights College (now University) in Adrian, and in July 1955 the college awarded her a bachelor’s degree with a major in home economics and minors in English and mixed science.

Assigned to the high school level in 1958, she taught home economics and health at Benedictine High School in Detroit for a year. Then for a few months she was kept in Adrian, where she helped in the priests’ kitchen and did some sewing for the novices that involved making new bridal dresses for the Reception ceremonies. In October 1959 she returned to Benedictine High School for two years.

Again, Sister Leona studied during the summers, but this time at Michigan State University in East Lansing, and in July 1960 she received a master’s degree with a major in vocational education and a minor in home economics. In 1961 she was changed to Cleveland, Ohio, where she taught home economics and health at Hoban Dominican High School for three years, then spent the 1964-65 year at St. Lawrence High School in Utica, Michigan.

Again in Adrian, Sister Leona served on the kitchen staff for a year. She was then assigned to Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette, Illinois, for two years. Her last teaching assignment was at Monsignor Gabriels High School in Lansing, where she spent four years. From that time on, all of her ministry was in Michigan.

She took a position as diet clerk at Edward W. Sparrow Hospital in Lansing, and served there for a year preparing menus for those with special needs. For the next year she served at the Outpost in Williamston, a farming community just outside of Lansing, as a clerk. From 1974-1979 she lived with and took care of a disabled woman and her child in Williamston, then spent five years as a pharmacy technician at the May Drug Store in Williamston.

Sorrow entered her life in 1984, when she lost her mother. Her father was also very ill, and she cared for him until his death in October 1985.

For the next few months, Sister Leona served as a driver for the retired sisters at St. Lucy Convent in Saint Clair Shores, a ministry that she enjoyed. Then, once again she became a pharmacy technician, this time at E-A Drug Store in East Detroit for five years. East Detroit was later called Eastpointe. In all, she served as a pharmacy technician for ten years.

Sister Leona retired in 1995, lived in Harrison Township, and volunteered her services. Her volunteer service included giving service to St. Hubert Parish and caring for the Oratory, a prayer chapel at St. Hubert that accommodated about twenty-four people. She would frequently arrive at the Oratory very early in the morning, “between 3:15am and 4:00am,” make her meditation, say her prayers, and get the cleaning done. The Oratory opened at 6:00am, and all
was in good order at that time. There are in her file articles about the Oratory in two papers, *The Macomb Daily* and the *Michigan Catholic*, and each mentioned her part in the Oratory and included her picture. The article in the *Macomb Daily* described her as “the administrator of the oratory.”

During her years of serving at St. Hubert, she was able to visit Ireland on a parish trip.

In 2013, Sister Leona suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized. She knew that it was time to return to Adrian. In April 2013 she became a resident of the Dominican Life Center/Maria. There she was not idle. She helped to feed the Sisters who were not able to feed themselves, set up and cleaned the tables in the solarium, visited the sick Sisters, and sat with those who were dying. Sister Frances said, “It seemed almost like she was one of the DLC co-workers.” God took Sister Leona to eternity on May 28, 2014, after a bad fall and head injury.

A wake-remembrance service was held for Sister Leona on June 1 in St. Catherine Chapel. Sister Frances Nadolny, Chapter Prioress of Great Lakes Dominican Mission Chapter, welcomed those present and extended sympathy. She summarized Sister’s life and ministry, and added:

*There are stories from our sisters who relied on Sister Leona to help with their elderly and ill parents, her own care of her father and taking him for a car ride each day to Belle Isle where the ice cream truck just happened to be parked. ... She did lovely needlework and beadwork. I found crochet hooks and patterns in her room. ... She was as neat as a pin in her apartment and in her room at the Dominican Life Center. She loved her family and had their pictures hanging on her walls. ... This past Wednesday, she took a bad fall around supper time and hit her head way too hard. I arrived around 10:00, and it was obvious that the co-workers were upset by her imminent death. Several of us, including Sister Vianne [Bayus], kept a prayerful vigil.*

Elizabeth Heard, Sister Leona’s chaplain, read a poem by Edward Hays that seemed to contain the sentiments that Sister Leona might have voiced. A small part of it is quoted here:

*My last breath does not say “goodbye,”*  
*For my love for you is truly timeless,*  
*Beyond the touch of death. . . .*  

*And all I take with me as I leave*  
*Is your love and the millions of memories*  
*Of all that we have shared.*

*Fear not nor grieve at my departure,*  
*You whom I have loved so much,*  
*For my roots and yours*  
*Are forever intertwined.*

Sister Dorothy Thielk remembered:
Sister Leona and I go way back to 1948, when we were in the novitiate together. She was a crowd ahead of me. Then we lost track of one another until 1992, when I moved to Harrison Township and began worshipping at the same church, St. Hubert. ... We belonged to the same parish and the same mission group, and began to see more of each other. She loved gardening, and for many years she and another parishioner planted flowers ... beautifying our parish. ... She loved to crochet, and every year at festival time she crocheted dresses for the dolls that were to be raffled off. She loved to bake. Whenever we had a mission group meeting, she always baked the most delicious rolls. ... 

A few years ago, she came to the meeting with store bought rolls. I began to realize that she was slowing down. She had a great love for the elderly and found joy in assisting them. ... Her whole life has been given in service to others. She will be greatly missed.

John Dixon, a former employee at St. Hubert Parish, also spoke. He said in part:

*Sister Leona became a friend, and she was a wonderful friend. My wife Cecilia and I always enjoyed the dinners we had with her. Sometimes they were held at our house, and sometimes we would go out to eat. We always had great conversations, but we didn’t know how sick she was. She never talked about her health. When she came to our house, Sister always brought the dessert. It was always wonderful—sometimes great, elaborate cakes—always followed by a thank-you note.

She was a hard worker, a servant to all. ... The Oratory at St. Hubert Parish was another sign of her service. She spent long, early, lonely hours there preparing it for the coming day. ... She was a great nun—always faithful to her vows and to the Church. I will miss her, and I know I speak for all at St. Hubert. We are better for knowing her.

Bill King, Sister’s nephew, spoke lovingly of his aunt. He said in part:

*Sister Leona, my aunt, was a wonderful person. She was a kind person who always thought the best of people. She was generous with the little money she had. ... She was a comforting person. She was there when my dad was in the hospital, holding his hand and bringing comfort to us when he died. In good times or bad, she was always there, leading us in prayer. ... She was a thankful person. She thanked everyone for everything, even small favors. She wanted to serve God, and she went into His service right out of high school. All of her life after that was in service to others.

In the place where she lived, she had a tiny yard, and it was always meticulous. In fact, she won awards for having the nicest yard in the neighborhood. ... She kept track of things that needed to be done—no one had to tell her to do it. She knew. We thank God for giving her to us. We will miss her sorely.

Sister Leona’s funeral liturgy was celebrated on June 2. Monsignor Ricardo Bass, pastor of St. Hubert Parish, was the presider and homilist. He spoke in praise of Sister, and of her service to his parish. Many members of her family were present, and they took part in the Mass—in the readings, in reading the prayer intentions, and bringing up the gifts.
Although Sister Leona preferred to remain in the background, never seeking acknowledgment of the service she gave to others, it is plain that there are many who will remember her and miss her very much.