Sister Alice Marie Lacina, OP
(1925 – 2014)

Sister Alice Marie Lacina was a humble, unassuming woman. Yet, as many Sisters said, she was also a very generous, hospitable person. Sister Maria Goretti Browne said at the wake, “We are grateful to the Lacina family . . . for giving us Alice, this quiet, reserved, kind, caring, humble person.” It is clear that Sister Alice Marie was loved, and she will be missed.

On January 2, 1925, in Owosso, Michigan, a daughter was born to Albert and Frances (Sheda) Lacina and was baptized Alice Helen. She was the ninth of their eleven children: eight girls (Mary, Frances, Sophie, Anne, Blanche, Agnes, Alice, and Helen) and three boys (Albert, Robert, and John). She wrote that she didn’t know much about her three oldest siblings, since by the time she entered the family they were married and had left their father’s house.

The Lacina family lived outside of Owosso in the country; and, although they were all baptized Catholic, they did not go to church because of the distance. They had no car, the father of the family had not learned to drive, and there were no means of getting to church other than walking.

Albert Lacina was born in Bohemia. His schooling included learning several languages, including English, which he spoke well. As a very young man he joined the army and became a cook. He and his brother immigrated to the United States in 1900. After his arrival in the United States, Albert looked up friends as they arrived and taught them to speak English.

The brothers settled in Flint, Michigan, but in 1909 Albert moved to Owosso where he met and married Frances Sheda. She was also from Europe, born in Moravia. Albert became a carpenter and managed to support his large family; but, as Sister wrote, “There wasn’t much money.”

The parents did not speak Bohemian in the home. Their father had taught their mother to speak English, and English was the language of their home. “When we had company, they spoke in their original language so we wouldn’t know what they were saying.”

Sister Alice Marie wrote that the parents were the head of the family, but that the older children helped in raising their younger siblings.

*My mother and father were strict, but never in a mean way. In those days you knew what you could do and not do. We knew right from wrong. We had our duties in the house . . . and there was no arguing. We never got spankings. . . . We got along pretty well.*

*We were not close and affectionate like some families. I found it very hard when I entered and saw all these nuns hugging and kissing. We never did that. We loved one another, but you just didn’t show it in that way.*
She wrote that when her brother joined the army, her father hugged him; and the only time he ever hugged her was when she left home to enter the Adrian Dominican Congregation. So the occasion had to be unusual for the parents or the children to become physically demonstrative.

All of the children began their education at Greenmeadow School, a one-room country school. She wrote that at the time she attended, four other Lacina youngsters were also enrolled. She was a small child, very shy, and cried a lot.

The next year, she and her siblings attended another country school, McCall. Sister Alice Marie wrote, “There were a lot of nice things going on at that school. . . We all brought our lunches, and sometimes the teacher would put a treat in a lunch bag.” She learned the Palmer method of writing, and earned several certificates for good handwriting.

At the wake, Sister Mary Alice Naour remembered:

*When Sister Alice Marie was little, if she found a penny her dad would tell her that she could keep it. Then she would hurry to the store to buy candy, but she didn’t just buy penny candy; she went to the counter where they sold chocolate, and bought a piece of chocolate.*

In 1934 the family moved into the city of Owosso, and the Lacina children attended public schools until 1940. Several times Alice saw some Sisters, the Oxford Dominicans, and they were all in black, “probably wearing their cloaks.” She wrote that she would go blocks out of her way to avoid them.

When Alice was in eighth grade, she transferred to St. Paul School with the Adrian Dominican Sisters. At that time, also, she started to attend church, made her First Communion, and went to high school. She wrote that when she made her First Communion, she and a couple of other older students had to walk down the aisle with the second graders, dressed in white.

Since her parents could not pay for attendance at a Catholic school, Alice began working in order to earn the tuition, not only for herself but also for her two younger siblings. She did babysitting and worked in a dime store and in a factory.

“I don’t remember the religion classes in high school,” she wrote. Since her public school elementary education had not included religion classes, she had not studied her religion much during those years. Much of what she heard in the high school religion classes, she did not understand. She graduated from St. Paul High School in June 1945.

Nevertheless, there must have been something about her. During her high school years, one of the Sisters asked her several times if she had ever thought of becoming a religious, and she would answer that she didn’t think she would fit in since she was only an average student and didn’t really like school. She finally decided to enter, however, and worked for several months in order to pay for all that was needed. “I don’t know why I entered, but I did. God must have wanted me.” She had begun to realize, also, that marriage did not appeal to her.
On February 2, 1946, at the age of twenty-one, she entered the postulate in Adrian from St. Paul Parish in Owosso, her mind made up that she would be the best Sister possible. She received the habit and her religious name on August 13, 1946, and professed her first vows on August 14, 1947.

In a short time she was on her way to Detroit, where she taught fourth grade at Precious Blood School. She served for nine years there, and taught fifth grade in the 1948-49 school year. In 1950 she was transferred to the primary grades, where she served for the balance of her teaching years.

During the first of those years, tragedy struck. She joined her siblings at the funeral of their mother in the summer of 1948. A happier occasion occurred in summer 1955, when she received a bachelor’s degree from Siena Heights College (now University) in Adrian, with a major in English and minors in history and mixed science.

She was changed to Illinois, in 1956, where she taught for seven years at Queen of Apostles School in Riverdale. During her second year there, she joined her siblings at the funeral of their father, who died in March 1958.

In 1963 she was transferred to St. Rita School in Chicago and remained there until February 1967. During the summers, she studied theology at Mount St. Mary Theology Institute in St. Charles, Illinois, which gave her greater understanding of her faith, and in 1964 she received a certificate in theology. In February 1967 she was assigned to St. Patrick School in Joliet, Illinois, and taught first grade there until 1970.

In 1970 she was brought back to Michigan, and taught first grade at St. Stephen School in Saginaw for a year. She was then assigned to her home parish, St. Paul in Owosso, where she taught for thirteen years. “When I taught I think I was a little strict,” she wrote. “I talked loud, but I know now that I was losing my hearing. I didn’t know that at the time.” She continued studying, and in 1974 she received an advanced certificate in religion from the Diocese of Lansing.

Sister Alice Marie left teaching in 1984 but continued to live in the convent at St. Paul Parish. She wrote that she took care of the ill mother of the first grade teacher. “She lived in a house between the school and the convent. I took care of her during the day and sometimes at night.” Whether the mother recovered or not, Sister did not tell us.

In 1987 she returned to Adrian, and ministered for four years as assistant in the activities department at Maria Health Care Center. She retired in 1991, but remained active as a worker in the campus mail room at the Motherhouse for sixteen years. During these years she lived in Regina Residence. She was surprised when a Jubilee party was given for her, and her friends learned that she had never before had a party in her honor.

In 2007, besieged by illness, she became a resident at the Maria Building of the Dominican Life Center, where she remained until her death on April 14, 2014, at the age of eighty-nine.
In her autobiography, she wrote that she had never traveled abroad, nor had she traveled in the United States any farther than her Illinois assignments. As the years passed, most of her siblings predeceased her. Her only living sibling is her sister, Blanche Jones, now living in Lansing, Michigan.

A wake-remembrance service was held for Sister Alice Marie in St. Catherine Chapel on April 21. Sister Maria Goretti Browne, Vicaress of Holy Rosary Mission Chapter, extended sympathy and welcomed all those who had gathered to bid farewell to Sister Alice Marie, including her sister Blanche and niece Alice. Sister Maria summarized Sister’s life and ministry, and added:

*Sister Alice was humble, quiet, and set in her ways. But she was determined! Even to the end, she was able to, and did, make decisions.*

*Sister Alice’s family has been very generous to the Congregation. . . . We are grateful to this family, who knew so many hardships and yet has been able to share what they have with us.*

Sister Mary Alice Naour shared remembrances:

*Sister Alice Marie liked to cook. She told me that when she retired from teaching at St. Paul in Owosso, she stayed on in the convent. . . . She told me that she made doughnuts which were served after Mass on Sunday. She seemed pleased that she could serve the parishioners in this way.*

*When she could no longer drive to Owosso, I told her I would be happy to drive her. I got to know her a little more during these drives. She seemed to open up and talk most of the way there, though our ride home was usually quiet. She loved her family, and we visited with her brother John, her sister Aggie and husband Joe, and her sister Anne. . . . On the way home we would often take a side trip to Lansing to visit with her sister Blanche. Those were very good visits, and Sister Alice Marie was very pleased.*

*I will remember her for her quiet ways, her kindnesses, and her prayerfulness. And I will also remember her coming early for Mass and sitting in the front row of the balcony. I miss seeing her there.*

Sister Alice Marie’s funeral liturgy was celebrated on April 22. Father James Hug, SJ, Motherhouse chaplain, was the presider and homilist. Father said in part:

*Sister Alice Marie was quiet, unassuming, humble. I know that many of you here have memories of her – how she would prepare birthday parties, see what was needed, and reach out to the needy. No one else did these things the way she did.*

*She was a child of God, a daughter of God. Today she lives in the presence of God. Today we celebrate her life.*

After the lovely ceremony, Sister Alice Marie was laid to rest in one of the circles in the Congregational cemetery, planned and laid out by Mother Camilla Madden many years ago.