



Sister Agnes Bonner, OSF *Professed 1944*



“Our role in life is to bring the light of our own souls to the dim places around us.”
— Joan D. Chittister



After a lifetime of serving others with light, joy, devotion, and love, Sister Agnes Bonner died on December 13, 2022. Sister Agnes grew up with her parents—Michael and Catherine—and her brothers and sister in Henry Clay/Wilmington, Delaware, where she and her family were members of St. Joseph on the Brandywine Parish. After graduating from Alexis I. du Pont High School, Agnes entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1942, professing her vows and taking the name Sister Catherine Michael in 1944.

Sister Agnes embraced others’ needs, bringing to them a deep caring and capable presence. Her ministry unfailingly reflected the depth and breadth of her gifts, all shared for the wellbeing of everyone—especially with the underserved with whom she ministered as the manager of the Emmanuel Dining Room in Wilmington—a program of the Ministry of Caring. Her friend, Sister Mary Vandergeest, spoke of how Sister Agnes, “Accepted all for who they were. She was a quiet, unassuming person and a very good listener.”

Sister Agnes used her love of science and her higher education to teach many students and even helped to coauthor a 7th grade science textbook. She served as a science teacher and head of the science department at West Catholic High School for Girls in Philadelphia; taught for 13 years in the Diocese of Trenton at both Blessed Sacrament School and McCorristin High School, where she also served as the head of the science department; and taught chemistry for nine years in the Allentown diocese at Holy Name School in Reading. She also helped to shape young minds while teaching science at St. Joseph School and Lancaster Catholic High School both in Lancaster; at St. Mary Children’s Home in Fall River, Massachusetts; and at St. Elizabeth School in Baltimore.

Sister Agnes was compassionate, capable, and always ready to embrace life’s difficulties. A breast cancer survivor, Sister Agnes was once one of the women featured in an American Cancer Society breast cancer exhibit entitled, “Living and Giving Exhibit.” Sister Agnes joined the “Reach to Recovery” program and volunteered to help others by visiting women who were recently diagnosed. She said of the experience, “There is no question that my involvement has made a difference in my life. . . . I have learned to appreciate life at its best—and am grateful for the myriad of blessings that come with each new day.”

Among her many interests, Sister Agnes enjoyed reading, swimming, and teaching in various literacy programs. Whatever she was doing, she embraced life with energy, talent, and a generous spirit. When asked to reflect on her life as a Sister of St. Francis, Sister Agnes wrote, “Being a member of the congregation has followed a straight line path, starting in grade school and progressing to today. It has been a journey of peace and many blessings for me and for others.” Her nephew, Philip Leach, a true champion for his aunt and supporter of the congregation, spoke of her spirit commenting, “She had a direct, personal relationship with each and every member of a very large extended family. Even while ministering in Philadelphia, Trenton, and Lancaster, Aunt Agnes was a constant presence in our lives. Her gentle demeanor belied her demanding expectations for herself and all of us which was often demonstrated at family reunions where she was like a celebrity, each person making sure to spend time with her.” Sister Mary Vandergeest reflected that, “Beyond the classroom, Sister Agnes taught by the way she lived. She touched people’s lives and continued to teach with her loving spirit.” All who knew Sister Agnes rejoice that she has been a part of their lives. The world holds a greater measure of joy because of her life—a life filled with light and countless gifts of the loving care and wisdom she has given.



All services will be held in Assisi House on Wednesday, December 21, and will be livestreamed. A Christian Wake Service will be held at 9:30 A.M. Mass of Christian Burial will follow at 11 A.M., with burial in Our Lady of Angels Cemetery.

