

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER M. ANGELA DAWES

January 11, 1927–February 3, 2015



Who is this Sister Angela Dawes?

She is another one of God's unique creations just like you and me.

As I began planning my reflections, I wondered just what I could share about the woman known as Sister Angela Dawes. After thinking about all the time I had spent with her these past 11 years at Caritas Christi—and you know I spent much time with her—I was worried that I would not have much to share. Well, as I listened to her oral history, I realized how much I really did know about her.

Angela Frances Dawes was the fourth child born to Angela Coleman Dawes and George Dawes on January 11, 1927. She said “I was named Angela after my mother and grandmother, I entered and received the name of Sister Angela, and I never changed my name.”

She was born at home as were three of her siblings, and she was proud of this. Angela had four siblings, George, Regina, Paula, and Peter. They lived in Elliott on Lorenz Avenue until the depression times when the family moved in with their grandmother who owned some houses on the West End Lookout. From there they looked down on the West End during the flood of 1936. Sister Angela commented that she heard the sisters were taken out of the convent by boats.

Angela attended Saint James Grade School and High School in West End. She remembered Sister Marie Dolores, Mother Marie Benedict, Sister Honora, and Sister Eugene O'Donnell from the high school. However, Angela did not remember her first grade teacher who made the children kneel on the floor to say prayers!

Sister had two aunts in our community, her mother's sisters, Sister Mary Paul Coleman and Sister Frances Mary Coleman, who came home for a visit every now and then. The children were invited to visit the sisters at the home of their grandmother and Aunt Jo. Sister Angela remembered, “We were not allow to move. We had to sit on the chairs and behave ourselves.”

Sister Angela heard the life of Mother Seton on the radio and told her mother that she would like to be a Sister of Charity. Her mother told her to talk to Sister Mary Paul. Sister Mary Paul thought that she did not know Angela well. She suggested that she discuss entering with Sister Marie Dolores who then became her sponsor. The pastor of Holy Innocents said “She is a good girl and comes from a good family. I think that you will find her a satisfactory candidate for your community.” So Angela Dawes entered the Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1946.

From this time on Sister Angela's ministry was teaching little children. She loved them and they loved her. She was a strict disciplinarian but a wonderful and creative first grade teacher. For the majority of her career she taught first grade; however, she taught second grade for a few years.

She told me once that she was so eager to see the children on the first day of school that she could not sleep all night because of her excitement. Sister Angela taught for one year in both Arizona and California but most of her teaching was in the big schools of Pittsburgh—Resurrection, Saint Stephen, Saint Philip, and Holy Innocents. Of her years teaching primary children, Sister Angela said they “have been challenging, fulfilling, and I trust, pleasing to the Lord.” Thus she her 46 years of teaching ministry.

The next exciting phase of Sister Angela’s life was enjoying the opportunity to volunteer in school. For three years she volunteered at Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton School (our former Holy Innocents). Then Sister Geri Marr, principal of Saint Philip’s School, warmly welcomed Sister Angela to a new school with new children to teach.

Sister Geri said “Sister Angela offers a cheerful, welcoming presence when she greets the children each day . . . she is very enthusiastic. The children come to school willing to work with Sister Angela because they know someone cares about them and wants them to reach their potential.”

Sister Angela loved to hop the bus and go into town. She would go to Mass at the Point. Then she would do some looking around, usually in Kaufmann’s, have lunch, and then do some serious shopping. Sister Angela loved to look nice. Everything always fit properly, matched exactly right. Each time she made a new purchase, she discarded an old item. Never did she have too many clothes in her closet! Even though she loved colors and loved to look well put together, Sister Angela said that she loved to wear the habit, “although the long skirt would dust the floor!”

In the summertime, Sister Angela went to visit her niece, Karen Foley, in Pompano Beach, Florida. Karen was Regina’s daughter. She enjoyed doing things with Karen and her children. It was a fun and different experience for her. She even wore shorts, but no one was supposed to know about this! She ate some interesting foods but not too interesting! She had a very self-limited diet! Boring, except for ice cream, donuts (she loved donuts), and candy . . . especially soft Twizzlers that she could pull apart.

A strong request Angela had for her funeral liturgy was a version of the Our Father that she heard sung in the parish church in Florida. She brought the actual music back and gave it to Gene Forish to play during her funeral. For someone who was not involved in music ministry, this setting of the Lord’s Prayer spoke very dearly to her heart. *(Sister Gertrude Foley, vocalist, and Gene Forish, organist, presented the musical piece at this point of the reflection.)*

The final phase of Sister Angela’s life was moving to Caritas Christi in Greensburg. Her health was failing and she had several falls and hospitalizations. She choose her room on the first floor with a big window that looked out on the garden. She had many happy days sitting in her room looking out the window. Apryl McKinzie, our activities director, had a butterfly bush planted outside Angela’s room and a humming bird feeder attached to her window. She studied the butterflies and knew their patterns of eating and she loved watching those little birds and the bright red throat of the male humming bird.

Sister Angela was my helper. She put notices of all kinds on the boards for me and never missed a date for the signage. As time went on Sister Angela became forgetful. Her memory always returned to her teaching days. She called our administrator, Ron Berlingo, the principal. She frequently thought the children were coming into the classroom and talked about the faculty meetings.

I tried to keep her engaged by taking her to activities and then leave when she was not watching. I would go to my office and soon would hear the familiar sound of her walker approaching my door. She would not stay without me!

The last activity that I took her to and stayed at was Art Miracles. This is the piece of art the Sister Angela created with a little encouragement! She actually loved to paint! *(The artwork was displayed for the congregation.)*



So now, dear Angela, you are at peace in the heart of God who loved you from all eternity. You are singing with all the angels in the heavenly choir.

I awakened the past two mornings with the verse from a song we Sisters of Charity know. It is the Christmas hymn “In a Little Village of Bethlehem” and the verse is “Alleluia, oh how the angels sang! Alleluia how it rang! And the sky was bright with the holy light o’er the place where Jesus lay.” How she loved Christmas!

So now Angela, “little angel,” sing to us forever from your special heavenly star.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Judy Laffey
February 6, 2015*