

## **Sister Mary Christopher Esler, CSA**

Sister Mary Christopher Esler, CSA, baptized Carol Gertrude Esler, died peacefully on January 31, 2021, at Nazareth Center, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Carol Gertrude began her “love affair with life” as she described it, on February 14, 1927. Born that day in Kaukauna, Wisconsin, in her home across the street from St. Mary’s Church, she was the third child of Nicholas Esler and Alfa Deno Esler. Throughout her life, she treasured her childhood memories of a loving father, mother, and two siblings who nurtured her faith and taught her to be generous especially to those in need.



By the time Carol was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, she knew she wanted to work in the healthcare field and become a nurse. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, she sensed a call to religious life, yet relieved that her father thought she was too young to go to the convent, she attended Kaukauna High School taking classes required for the nursing field. In 1945 upon her graduation from high school, God knocked on the door of her heart again with a call to religious life. However, she had a career path she wanted to pursue and chose to enroll as a Cadet Nurse in St. Agnes School of Nursing in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. She received her RN certificate in 1948.

Once again, God’s call to religious life touched her heart. Although she received her nursing certificate through the Sisters of St. Agnes, she was not interested in joining their community and began investigating missionary communities of women religious. However, one of the sisters in the nursing school recognized the letters Carol was receiving from other religious congregations and arranged an interview for her with the general superior of the Sisters of St. Agnes. Carol agreed to meet with Mother Angeline because, after all, they did do missionary work in Nicaragua. To her surprise, Mother Angeline invited her to enter the community the following week. Carol accepted the invitation and began what she called her biggest romance in life.

Carol entered the Sisters of St. Agnes in 1948 and, when received into the novitiate in 1949, became Sister Mary Christopher. She made her first profession of vows on August 15, 1951.

Sister Mary Christopher fulfilled her childhood dream and served in healthcare ministries throughout her life. She received her BS in Nursing from Marian College in 1951. Following graduation, she worked as a staff nurse at St. Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac. In 1953, St. Agnes Hospital recognized the need to open an Occupational Therapy Department. Sister Mary Christopher's talents in crafts and her nursing background made her a perfect candidate for this position. From 1954 to 1957, she attended the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota, earning a certificate as a Registered Occupational Therapist. She then organized, initiated, and expanded the Occupational Therapy Department at St. Agnes Hospital while at the same time working as a nurse therapist and in rehab at Nazareth Heights Infirmery, the retirement center for the Sisters of St. Agnes. After serving in Pastoral Care at St. Clare Hospital in Monroe, Wisconsin, from 1979—1980, Sister Mary Christopher returned to Fond du Lac for hospice training and worked for five years as a home visit nurse with Hospice Hope. Returning to CSA community service in 1985, Sister Mary Christopher provided therapeutic services, foot care, and transportation for the elderly sisters at Nazareth Heights and at the new CSA retirement center, Nazareth Court and Center in Fond du Lac until 2008. After her years in full-time ministry, Sister Mary Christopher offered foot care for the sisters with whom she lived at the CSA motherhouse. In 2019, Sister Mary Christopher became a resident at Nazareth Court and Center. There, her nursing services continued, as she would often spend her days crocheting baby caps for the newborns at St. Agnes Hospital. Her healing touch will be remembered by many.

Sister Mary Christopher had a contemplative spirit which she expressed through her poetry and storytelling. She enjoyed biking and being in nature, was an avid bird watcher and lover of wildflowers, and was committed to the care of Earth even advocating that the land near the former Nazareth Heights become a Nature Preserve for the people of Fond du Lac County. She also found great spiritual solace through her participation with the Bread of Life Charismatic Prayer Group.

Sister Mary Christopher was preceded in death by her parents, Nicholas and Alfa Esler, her brother, George and her sister, Vera Juckem.

She is survived with great fondness by her nine nieces, one nephew, their families, and the Sisters of St. Agnes, with whom she lived, prayed, and ministered.

A burial service for Sister Mary Christopher was held on February 3, 2021, at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. A private Memorial Mass for Sister Mary Christopher will be celebrated on February 18, 2021, at Nazareth Center Chapel with Father Ken Smits, Capuchin, presiding.

Memorials may be directed to the CSA Mission Advancement Office, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac, WI, 54937.

The Sisters of St. Agnes are grateful to the nurses and staff of Nazareth Court and Center for their care of Sister Mary Christopher in her last years of life.

Zacherl Funeral Home is serving the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes.