

Sister Joan Wirz, CSA

Sister Joan Wirz, CSA, (baptized Josephine Anna) died peacefully at Nazareth Center on August 24, 2014.

Born in Monroe, Wisconsin, on October 6, 1923, she was the first child of Otto and Ida Wirz, who named her Josephine Anna. A brother, George Otto, was born six years later. The Wirz family lived humbly in peace and security on the second floor of the cheese factories that employed her father, a Swiss immigrant.

Upon completing high school, she worked as a nurse aide at St. Clare Hospital in Monroe until old enough to enter St. Agnes School of Nursing in Fond du Lac. During that time she sensed her call to religious life and entered the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes in 1943. Following her first profession of vows on August 15, 1945, she was a nurse for thirteen years until asked to get a degree in hospital administration. From 1960 to 1963 she was administrator of St. Thomas Hospital in Colby, Kansas, while attending summer school at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. After receiving her MBA in 1963, she became CEO of St. Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac, a position she held until 1980. From 1981 to 1987 she served in administration at Nazareth Heights Infirmary, then spent six years as Special Assistant to the President of St. Agnes Hospital and Waupun Memorial Hospital.



During a thirty-day retreat in 1988, Sister wrote, "I long to live simply, demand little, be able to give and do for others, and have time for solitude and quiet." In her later years, she was especially grateful for what she was able to accomplish as CEO of St. Agnes Hospital. Under her leadership, the hospital became a separate corporation with its own by-laws and legal status. Lay people became part of the hospital's management team and board of directors. These changes encouraged joint planning with local civic organizations to improve services for people in the wider Fond du Lac area. One concrete result was the founding of Samaritan Clinic, which continues to thrive today.

Sister Joan was preceded in death by her parents and her brother, Bishop George Wirz of the Diocese of Madison. She is survived by her step-nephews Ronald, David, and Steven Buholzer; several cousins, including William Emmenegger, Barbara Lamm, and Judith Ash; and the Sisters of St. Agnes with whom she lived, prayed, and ministered.

Visitation will be held at Nazareth Court and Center, 375 Gillett St., Fond du Lac, WI at 9:30 a.m. followed by a Prayer Service at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, August 28, 2014.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 2:00 p.m., on August 28, 2014, at St. Francis Home Chapel, 33 Everett Street, Fond du Lac, WI. Father Ken Smits, Capuchin, will preside. Burial will follow at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery.

Memorials can be directed to the Sisters of St. Agnes Development Office, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac, WI 54937.

The sisters are grateful to the nurses and staff of Nazareth Court and Center for their care of Sister Joan and also in her last months to the staff of Hospice Hope.

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