

Sister Audrey Pfannenstiel, CSA

Sister Audrey (Bertha) Pfannenstiel, CSA, 96, died on Wednesday, November 17, 2010, in St. Francis Home where she resided.

Snow on the ground in Kansas on June 4, 1914, was unusual, but so was the white hair on the baby girl born that day to Ludwig and Johanna Archer Pfannenstiel. Christened Bertha, she was the middle child of seven boys and six girls in the farming family. Bertha carried happy memories of her childhood on the farm in a loving, faith-filled family. She was especially close to her Dad, spending much time with him outdoors. She also learned from her mother whom she remembers as wise and practical.



From her earliest years at St. Joseph School in Hays, Bertha had school in her blood. She loved learning, her religious events, and the Sisters who taught her. She frequently helped the teachers with younger students as well as with church work. It was no surprise when she asked to go to the convent after eighth grade. Her parents, thinking she was too young at thirteen to leave home, asked that she finish high school in Hays. When two other girls from her class left to enter, however, Bertha's parents also consented to her making the trip to Fond du Lac in the summer of 1928. Though she missed her family, Bertha took happily to religious life, professing her first vows as Sister Audrey in 1933.

Following profession Sister Audrey enthusiastically began her ministry of teaching at St. Mary's School in Fond du Lac. With a bachelor's degree in education from Fordham and later a master's degree from St. Louis University, Sister Audrey taught mostly middle grade or junior high students for well over fifty years in Wisconsin, New York, Indiana, and Kansas. She is remembered as a good and kind teacher, one invested in her students' successes, in their intellectual and spiritual growth. She ended her teaching career, continuing to serve in the school office so she could still see the children she dearly loved and even occasionally tutor those that needed extra help.

As a community member, Sister Audrey is remembered as being quiet and pleasant. In retirement, she returned to St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac and then to Nazareth Court/Center and St. Francis Home as health declined. Always wanting to be helpful, Sister Audrey remained quietly active as she could, singing in the choir, folding towels, and participating in activities at St. Francis. When well, she greeted visitors with a big smile and a greeting, "You look nice today." The smile grew even bigger when she reminisced about her teaching days and the students who passed through her classes. Becoming bedridden in the last few weeks, Sister Audrey longed to return to the God she had served for seventy-seven years. From the Great Teacher she hoped to receive the reward promised in the Book of Daniel: that "the wise shall shine brightly...and those who teach justice to many shall be like the stars forever."

Sister Audrey is survived by one sister, Mildred Walters of Hays, Kansas, and one brother, Ed of Benton, Kansas; nephews, nieces and grandnieces and grandnephews; and the Sisters of St. Agnes with whom she lived, prayed, and ministered.

Preceding her in death are her parents, Ludwig and Johanna Dreher Pfannenstiel; six brothers: John, Alexander, Ted, Richard, Julius, and Francis; and four sisters: Matilda Pfannenstiel, Irene Pfannenstiel, Regina Ray, and Eleanore Binder.

Visitation: Visitation for Sister Audrey will be held on Saturday, November 20, from 10:00 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. at Nazareth Court and Center, 375 Gillett Street, Fond du Lac. A prayer service will be held at 11:00 a.m.

Services: A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Saturday, November 20, 2010, at 6:30 p.m. in the St. Francis Home Chapel, 33 Everett Street, Fond du Lac. Father Ken Smits, OFM. Cap. will preside. Burial will be at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery on Monday, November 22, at 9:00 a.m.

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