



FRANCISCAN Prints



Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception • *“A Caring, Praying Presence”* • West Peoria, Illinois

Immaculate Conception Convent: 309-674-6168

FEBRUARY 2026

In Memoriam

SISTER MARY ANITA PAUWELS

NOVEMBER 4, 1932 — DECEMBER 13, 2025



Sister Mary Anita was the first daughter of Camiel and Ann, born on November 4, 1932. Her sisters and brother, Barbara Ann, John Noel, and Grace Joanne followed her. Growing up, Sister Mary Anita attended Sacred Heart School in Moline, St. Joseph’s School and Alleman High School in Rock Island. After high school, she worked for several years at Canteen Service Company before entering religious life in 1955 as a Sister of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception.

After the novitiate and her profession of vows, Sister Mary Anita served the Peoria Diocese as a religious education coordinator for many years. Her work and service in religious education included the Aledo Plan where she helped to develop lesson plans and materials to assist parish religion education in lesson planning and instruction classes, known as Catechism classes in those years.

Throughout her life, Sister Mary Anita had the desire to serve and to help people. Living in Henry, Illinois, for over twenty years, she had the opportunity to fulfill this desire with home visits to parishioners and assisting the pastor.

Sister Mary Anita was extremely talented in designing her own patterns for cross stitch. She often made cross stitch gifts for her sisters and for her family. Sister Mary Anita had an amazingly organized and mathematical mind evident in her puzzle building skills. Her method was to separate each piece according to color, shape, and strategic placement.

She loved her family and often shared stories of happy reunions and trips to Michigan. Recently, Sister Mary Anita had lived at EverTrue Lutheran Hillside Village, and her desire to know, to share, and to help people was ever present.

Continuing the Commitment to Education

In 1890, four sisters responded to Archbishop John Spalding’s need to staff the diocesan orphanage in Metamora, Illinois. On February 2, 1891, the four sisters professed vows as a diocesan order in Peoria. By 1915, the call to fill diocesan needs also included teaching in fourteen parish schools and staffing two homes for the

aging. Over the years, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception have served in many parish schools in the diocese as teachers, administrators, and principals, as well as teaching adult learners. While our sisters are not serving in schools currently, our commitment to education remains strong.



The foundation sponsors the education for seventy-five orphan girls in Chennai.

One example of our commitment to education is the involvement of Sister Subha Clare Ramesh in the ARSR Charitable Foundation. Sister Subha Clare is vice president of this group whose mission is to improve the life-chances of children and adults in India through support for education and health care. The ARSR Charitable Foundation began in 2021, following the deaths of Dr. Anant Ramamoorthy, a research chemist, and Dr. Susila Ramamoorthy, a research physicist, (sister’s aunt and uncle) who left their estate to the family to start this foundation. Since 2021, this group has donated over \$1 million to benefit the education of underprivileged children and adults through fifteen organizations.

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Sisters of St. Francis Celebrate

Sisters were asked to share their greatest joy in being a



"The trust of being a spouse of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is a privilege beyond imagination. That knowledge gives me great joy." – Sister Mary Jo

"My greatest joy of being a Sister of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception is living with loving, fantastic, supportive women as well as the opportunity to be close to God especially through prayer." – Sister Mary Patricia

"Being a sister brings the finest, loving relationships with a common goal." – Sister Mary Elaine

"My greatest joy as a Sister of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception is being part of a greater whole, blending my gifts as well as my weaknesses with other sisters to be the compassionate presence in our world that God wants me to be." – Sister Mary Barbara

"My greatest joy (and deepest gratitude) is that I was called to member in this particular congregation and this is the source of the following stream of joyous blessing which continues to gladden my days, e.g., like praying together in the Eucharistic Presence." – Sister Rose Madonna

"One of the greatest benefits of my religious life was being accepted into this community and having the support of and from them as I followed and continue to follow our Rule and Constitutions." – Sister Marion

"One of my greatest joys of being a Sister of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception is having my sisters as companions." – Sister Alice Marie

"My exposure and interaction with this Community has been almost my entire life. God's guidance and goodness has continued to shine, nourish, and fortify me and those whom they serve through these many years in these women of faith." – Sister Betty Jean

"The joy of all the people I have met and the relationships I have made along the way. The whole journey has been a BLESSING." – Sister Paula

"My greatest joy of being a Sister of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception is my gratitude for living my entire religious life with this community of sisters. They are remarkable, dedicated, supportive women." – Sister Irene Marie

"I especially find joy in the variety of community members. Their varied family backgrounds, personalities, interests, ministry and life experiences, enrich my daily life and help to deepen my spirituality." – Sister Janice

"EVERYTHING! I am joyfully grateful to God for choosing me to journey with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception. Every challenge, joy, difficulty, delight, disappointment, celebration...Each sister in all her uniqueness, in her smiling welcome or crankiness, has been and continues to be a source of entering more deeply into the Mystery of God." – Sister Jacqueline

"From my first encounter with the sisters, I was drawn to their joy and care for us and for each other. That joy and compassionate care for others and each other still inspires me and draws me to holiness." – Sister Kathleen Ann



135 Years as a Religious Community

member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception

"On earth there is a place we call "home," but if you are transient, living throughout your lifetime serving in different parishes and places, "home" is a place of the heart. It is the comfort of a loving togetherness, the acceptance, support, and prayer which the sisters give to one another." – Sister Diane Marie

"My greatest joy has been the support, prayers, and love I receive from my sisters. After my accident, it was the prayers and support of my sisters that pulled me through those days and years." – Sister Mary Ann

"I enjoy having the support of my fellow sisters in becoming my best self. I always have their witness and example to challenge me to be more. I enjoy ministering alongside of the other sisters...knowing that I'm not alone in service to others. I enjoy the laughter and fun that we have over simple happenings." – Sister Anna Marie



"My sisters, who accompany me on this journey of faith; who trust in God's providence no matter the odds; who walk beside others in times of both sorrow and celebration; and whose empathy and compassion make a difference in peoples' lives. How could they not be my greatest joy?" – Sister Holly Marie

"My greatest joy in being a member of this religious community is being united with women of great faith! Our Franciscan heritage is rooted in joyful service to our Lord. I am truly blessed." – Sister Barbara

"It is a joy to recognize we are a BLESSING to one another. This JOY grows in sharing our faith, celebrating life, supporting one another, and growing in community." – Sister Linda

"My greatest joy of being a member of this community is to know that as we age and mature we strive to become more like Christ no matter what we do, have done, or will do. God knows it all, loves us through it, and sees the good we strive to bring forth in our life." – Sister Mary Lenore

"My greatest joy is the support and encouragement I receive from the sisters since I entered – for my education, ministries, and vocation." – Sister Subha Clare





Continuing the Commitment to Education

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These thirty students are in an after-school education program which operates in the evenings six days a week in the foyer of a teacher's home. The foundation sponsors sixty-eight such village programs.

In October, Sister Subha Clare and three other board members visited these fifteen organizations in India. "I was overwhelmed meeting the students in each of the schools. The children were so full of joy and eager to learn," said Sister Subha Clare. Many of these students are first generation learners, and their parents (often single parents) are day laborers who never had a chance to receive an education. Sister stated, "I asked many of the children what they wanted to do with their education. Almost all said they want to serve as doctors, police officers, and government administrators because they want to help underprivileged people like them."

The foundation also sponsors vocational education for adults. "In the vocational institute, a woman in her 40s shared that she had two teenage children, and she is showing them the importance of getting an education by going back to school for her beauty technician certificate. She shared that she and another student are planning to open a beauty salon, and have received financing and support from the institute. She made me cry when she said she was proud of herself for the first time in her life." Being part of the ARSR Charitable Foundation allows Sister Subha Clare to continue the commitment to education that is a keystone for the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception.

*Join us for Stations of the Cross on Friday, March 27, at 7p.m.
Prayers for you on your Lenten journey.*