



Sister M. Canisia Gerlach, O.S.F.

August 29, 1914 - May 26, 2011

## The OSF Saint Francis Medical Center Family

# Remembering Sister Canisia

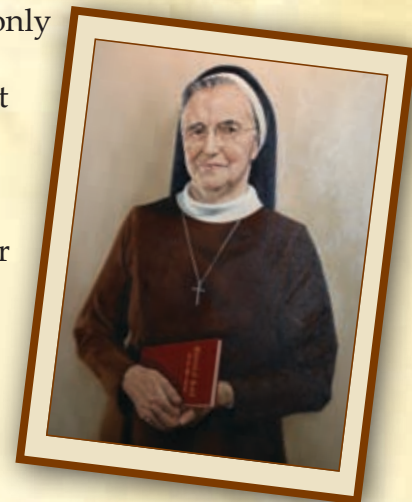
When a member of a leadership team passes away, it is natural to reflect on their administrative accomplishments. The projects they oversaw, the policies they implemented, and the dollars they saved are all a large part of what made them a success.

But at an organization like OSF Saint Francis Medical Center, these things are all just icing on the cake. Because this organization runs on one thing - that little 36 word statement that is emblazoned on our buildings, our nametags and our email signatures. It is our Mission. It is our vision. It is our values. That statement is the lifeblood of this organization. We live it. We breathe it. And we attempt to do so in the way that Sister Canisia taught us.

Whether you knew her or not, Sister Canisia helped to shape this medical center into the exemplary healthcare institution it has become. This was due not only to her leadership, but also her kindness and love. When an administrator makes an effort to get to know so many employees on a personal level, that is what care and love is all about. That's what our Mission is all about.

As caregivers, we care. As administrators, we lead. And we all do so with the greatest care and love. Every day. Sister Canisia will always be a member of the OSF Saint Francis Medical Center family, watching over us, as all angels do.

Inside are some memories from those who knew Sister.





### **Sue Wozniak, RN, Former Chief Operating Officer**

I worked with Sister Canisia in the same office for many years. She was always so joyful and filled with hope. Not to say she did not worry. She would worry about the finances or some other strategic matter before us. We knew that she would pray about these matters. She would tell us "Do the right thing and God will reward us". She was such a wonderful role model for all of us in administration. We witnessed her kindness, her compassion and yet she had a great business sense. Sometimes employees or patients who were down and out would come by to visit with her. They would tell their story. Several times, I witnessed her reach into her pocket where she kept a tiny coin purse and she would hand them a few dollars. Just watching her do that helped me to understand what the Mission of OSF Saint Francis Medical Center was all about.



Sister loved Christmas. She single handedly saw to all the decorating at the hospital. She sent hundreds of Christmas cards that she signed and often wrote a personal note to the receiver. Once she was hospitalized during the pre-Christmas season. I went to see her and she was so worried about getting out her cards. She wanted us to bring her those cards so she could get started on them. It was so important to her to send a Christmas message to all she knew and loved.

It goes without saying that Sister Canisia was the heart and soul of OSF Saint Francis and the Children's Hospital of Illinois. She especially loved the children. She kept track of everything, even in retirement at the Motherhouse.

I could go on and on but these are my favorite things about her. She was more like a mother to me than a boss. I loved her dearly.



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### **Linda Cooper, RN, BSN, CAPA, Perioperative Coordinator Surgery**

I would like to share a funny story! Just to show you how good of an eye she kept on all of us. One day around Christmas a few years ago, Sister called me directly at the charge phone in pre-op wondering why our surgery census was so low for the day. I saw on the spy phone that the call was from her. I still smile about that - it was very sweet.

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### **Lorie J. Helle RN, MSN, Black Belt Six Sigma**

When I was a staff nurse on the Mother Baby Care Unit and Level 2 Nursery, Sister sent me a personalized handwritten thank you card for a job well done. I had written a story about the best nursing team, entered it into a nursing magazine contest and won. I cherish that handwritten card from Sister, and it still means so much to me that she took time out of her day to send a staff nurse a thank you card. God Bless Sister, and I will miss her!







## Michelle Wildenratt, Pediatric Residency Program Coordinator, U of IL College of Medicine

I have been the Pediatric Residency Program Coordinator for 19 years. Early on I found out that Sister Canisia wanted stamps for one of her nephews who collected them. This was before the Electronic Residency Application System when I would literally get over 1,000 applications from all over the world. At the end of recruitment season, I would send them to her. I always got a handwritten note card from her warmly thanking me for collecting them for her.

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## Tim Switzer, RN, OSF Call Center

When I first started at OSF Saint Francis, I worked weekends as an orderly in the old emergency room.

During cold weather the local misfortunate would come in to get out of the cold. It was the duty of the lowest person on the totem pole (usually the orderly) to take them to a holding room down the hall and get them cleaned up – not at all a pleasant task. I found the task particularly distasteful because I felt disdain for these people who were “obviously, abusing the system.”

I was always relieved when I saw this tiny, brown-habit wearing Sister show up. She was always cheerful and willing to take the grungiest of the lot to clean up. At first, I just couldn't understand how she could treat them with such kindness and consideration, when they were obviously victims of their own poor life choices, but I was grateful for the help.

One evening I was commenting to Carol, the Charge Nurse, about “the poor nun that gets assigned to help down here on the weekends.” She just laughed, then patiently explained to this clueless new orderly, “She's not assigned here, she's the Administrator of this Hospital! She just comes down to help out!”

Seeing her caring for the refuse of society – living the Mission - changed me, opened my eyes, made me a better person.

As the years passed. I changed jobs and often met with Sr. Canisia in her office and even in the Board Room, but I will always remember and be most grateful for those life-lessons she shared with me in that dingy ER holding room.

## Janet Southwood, RN, OSF Call Center

I was a very young nurse working in the OSF Saint Francis ED on 3rd shift when Sister Canisa was our administrator (around 1980 or so). Early one morning, a woman called the ED with some questions about “rectal bleeding”. In “those days” we could not give telephone advice and we did not have the luxury of the absolutely wonderful OSF Call Center! The woman was obviously distressed and concerned - the only thing that I really could tell her was that she was welcome to come into the ED to be evaluated OR she could call her own MD. Not in my wildest dreams did I think that she would really call her MD at 4 o'clock in the morning! So, guess who I got a call from? The “physician” that she called! Well, when “he” called the ED, he wanted to know what nurse had talked to this woman and told her to call her doctor. Well, I “fessed up” and admitted it was me who had spoken with her, but I tried to explain that I certainly did NOT suggest she call him then and there! All I could think was that I was really going to be fired! And I was terrified!

So, I wrote a letter to Sister Canisa explaining the whole story. She responded with a letter and to this day, I still have it! You can only imagine how kind and loving it was. She reassured me that she knew I was trying to do the best job that I could and certainly no ill should come of this encounter! What a relief this was for me. And to think, that *she* had taken her time to console me. Needless to say, I have always held her in high esteem. We can forget hurtful words, but sometimes it is very hard to forget how someone has made us feel - I will never forget that she made me feel that everything would be okay and that I mattered!

Thank you Sister Canisa for your sweet and pure spirit - I truly hope you rest in peace.

