

Sisters of St. Francis

o f M a r y I m m a c u l a t e

Sister Ruth Berry (Sister Norma Clara Berry)
A Franciscan Woman Faithful to
God and the Mission
North American by birth and
Brazilian by affection

Born and raised in the then small town of Shelby, Ohio, the young Ruth Anne Berry, was enchanted by the presence and ministry of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Mary Immaculate. Over time, Ruth Anne cultivated the desire to identify with their way of being by becoming one of them.

With enthusiasm she began her initial formation process, humbly revealing her musical talent and becoming an exceptional harpist and an excellent organist. Gradually, she came to know and deepen her understanding of the spirituality of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. When she professed her first vows, she received the name Sister Norma Clare.

With creativity, for a few years, she dedicated herself to the education of children, but in 1963, the Congregation intensified its missionary spirit and expanded its Franciscan presence across the border. The young Sister Norma Clare, along with three other North American Sisters, were chosen, blessed and sent to Brazil, a missioning which she welcomed with joy and hope.

She promptly packed her bags and for the first time traversed the Atlantic Ocean from North America to South America, eventually arriving in the small town of Santa Helena de Goiás, eager to immerse herself in Brazilian culture and learn the very difficult Portuguese

Alleluia!



Sister Ruth Anne Berry, OSF

language. I am a witness of the day when Sister Norma Clare, with the other three Sisters arrived in Santa Helena. Leaving Goiânia, the capital of the State of Goiás, they traveled in a small car for over eight hours, making their way on bumpy dirt roads to their expected destination. They disembarked with white habits, naturally tired, under the cheerful and curious eyes of the local population that had no knowledge or experience of religious sisters. I was very impressed by the smile and delicacy of Sister Norma Clare as she picked up her suitcase which was covered in dust.

The official presentation of the Sisters to the parish community of Santa Helena took place during the celebration of the Christmas liturgy. I remember the four Sisters around the old pump organ of the church – four angels in white, with harmonious voices, singing Christmas hymns, the parishioners had never heard before. Sister Norma Clare's nimble fingers gracefully caressed the keys of the instrument, and her beautiful voice led the voices of the other sisters. A kind of ecstasy enveloped the whole assembly.

Irmã Norma Clara's joy, her way of relating to everyone she met and her generous availability to serve soon caught the attention of the people, especially of the young women who felt God's

call to religious life. And, what to do with these potential vocations? The sisters had been in Brazil for only two and a half years.

Faced with this reality, the Congregation responded to the call to welcome Brazilian women as future sisters, and Irmã Norma Clara was chosen to be the formator of the Aspirants. We were seven young women full of life, hope and vigor with our dear teacher and mentor who did not yet understand all of our popular expressions and youthful language. With humility and patience our dear Aspirant Mistress, in the spirit of Franciscan minority, also became an apprentice with us.

Due to the need for greater resources for the integral formation of the future sisters, Irmã Norma Clara accompanied the aspirants to the capital city of Goiânia. Months later, she was appointed the Mistress of Postulants. For her availability, obedience and loving dedication as a formator, the following year she was appointed Mistress of Novices. Together, we moved with the sisters from the city to a very rural area five kilometers from Goiânia. Motivated by their missionary zeal and energized by our faithful, discreet, but lively company, we visited all the residents of the nearby farms and clusters of residents throughout the region, going by a horse-drawn cart or a Volkswagen van.

Realizing that the girls and young women of the region did not study because of the long distance to the nearest public school and that similarly, the boys and men had little opportunity for schooling as well, Irmã Norma Clara, along with four newly professed sisters, established what is now the San Damiano Institute. At the time, the building was in its initial phase of construction. Classes for the children took place in the afternoon. Evening classes were devoted to adult literacy and ongoing education for men of the region.

After a few years in Brazil, Sister Norma Clare

returned to her baptismal name: Ruth Anne. Among other activities and commitments, she generously served in Regional leadership for the Congregation in Brazil for various periods of time, always collaborating with the regional programs for Initial Formation. Ever attentive to opportunities for learning, she provided all of the sisters with the best possible ongoing formation, sparing no effort in motivating us to participate in meetings, courses and lectures.

Wherever she went and whomever she met along the way, Sister Ruth was recognized as a person fulfilled in her vocation and happy to serve the People of God with unparalleled delicacy. This Franciscan witness remains her legacy. In recent years, a long illness from which she never recovered carried with it significant and progressive physical limitations. Through it all, she remained serene, and she never ceased to express her deep gratitude for the care and kindness she received.

Sister Ruth was a prayerful Franciscan, with strong convictions, prudent in her words, moderate in her decisions, very community-oriented, attentive, tender, welcoming of everyone, a model of simplicity and detachment from things; admirable was her testimony of belonging to the Congregation and to the mission in Brazil.

We, Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate in Brazil who had the grace of having Sister Ruth as a co-sister, teacher and leader, along with the many people who knew her, thank God and the Congregation for sending her to walk with us and, in a very affectionate way, we thank Sister Ruth for the incalculable value of her presence, testimony of life and legacy that she left us as a faithful Franciscan disciple of the Risen One.

Alleluia!

Sr. Teresinha Mendonça Del' Acqua, OSF
Witness since the day that Sister Ruth Anne Berry arrived in Santa Helena de Goiás and 60 years of coexistence.

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Sister Ruth Anne Berry, OSF

December 9, 1932 — February 4, 2026

<i>Born:</i>	December 9, 1932
<i>Parents:</i>	Dorwin James Berry and Norma Clare Laux
<i>Postulancy:</i>	September 6, 1948
<i>Novitiate:</i>	August 12, 1949
<i>First Profession:</i>	August 12, 1951
<i>Final Profession:</i>	August 13, 1954
<i>Entered New Life:</i>	February 4, 2026

Ministry History

1951-1956	Teacher: Grades 2, 3, 4, Music/Organist: St. Ann, Lansing, Illinois
1956-1959	Teacher: Grades 5, 6, 7/Organist: St. Paul the Apostle, Joliet, Illinois
1959-1960	Teacher: Grade 7, Sacred Heart, Englewood, Chicago, Illinois
1960-1963	Teacher: Music/Organist: St. John the Baptist, Joliet
1963-1966	Director of Candidates: Santa Helena, Brazil, South America
1966-1970	Head Mistress of Novitiate, Goiânia, Brazil
1970-1972	Councilor: Congregation, Goiânia, Brazil
1972	Coordinator Brazil Missions: Congregation, Center House, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1973	Coordinator Brazil Missions/Teacher: Congregation, Center House, Instituto San Damiano, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1974	Coordinator Brazil Missions/Teacher/Vice Directress: Congregation, Center House, Instituto San Damiano, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1975	Vice Directress of CEFEPAL (Center of Franciscan and Pastoral Studies for Latin America): CEFEPAL, Petropolis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1976-1977	Directress: Curso CEFEPAL: Petropolis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1978-1980	Director: San Damiano, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1981-1982	Area Coordinator/Director of Formation: Centerhouse, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1982	Area Coordinator: Centerhouse, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1983-1984	Area Coordinator/Local Coordinator/Pastoral Ministry: Centerhouse, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1985	Regional Coordinator/Pastoral Ministry: Convento San Damiano, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1986-1988	Regional Coordinator/Parochial Ministry: Convento San Damiano, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1987-1989	Parochial Ministry: Convento San Damiano, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
1990-2001	Director of Temporary Professed/Parish Ministry: Novitiate, Hidrolândia, Goiás, Brazil
2002-2003	Regional Secretary: San Antonio, Hidrolândia, Goiás, Brazil
2004-2005	Regional Minister: San Antonio, San Damiano, Hidrolândia, Goiás, Brazil
2005-2007	Regional Coordinator: Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
2008-2011	Pastoral Minister: Santa Helena, Goiás, Brazil
2012-2020	Regional Secretary: Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
2020-2026	Ministry of Presence and Prayer/Translator for Congregation communications
<i>Memorial Mass:</i>	April 27, 2026 — St. Patrick's Residence, Naperville, Illinois
<i>Burial:</i>	Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil
<i>Predeceased by:</i>	Her parents, Dorwin James Berry and Norma Clare Laux; her brothers, Dorwin James Berry, Jr. and Richard Lee Berry; her sister, Jeanne Marie Berry; her sisters-in-law, Lois Langford Berry and Evelyn Kay Berry
<i>Survived by:</i>	Her brothers, William Bernard Berry and James Thomas Berry; sister-in-law, Constance Berry

Rest in Peace, Sister Ruth Anne!