



Hospital Sisters of St. Francis

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From: Brian C. Blasco

Director of Communications and Archivist - Assistant Coordinator of Community Life

Date: July 18, 2024

RE: Sister Zosima Vahrenkamp, OSF

Birth	February 25, 1848, in Osnabruck, Germany, and named Maria
Parents	Gerhard and Louise (Weilerschwist) Vahrenkamp
Entered HSOSF	May 2, 1870
Profession of First Vows	August 31, 1872
Missionary to the USA	October 1875 at age 27

Assignments

Alton, IL		1875
Springfield, IL	St. John's Hospital	1875
Effingham, IL	St. Anthony's Hospital	1877
Belleville, IL	St. Elizabeth's Hospital	1888 Superior/Administrator
Eau Claire, WI	Sacred Heart Hospital	1890 Superior/Administrator
Springfield, IL	St. John's Hospital	1910

Entered Eternal Life (age 64)

February 10, 1913, and buried in Crucifixion Hill Cemetery (Springfield, IL)

Alton

My dear, good Reverend Mother!

Finally one has a little rest and is able to write to you, dear Reverend Mother, about me and America. Yet, at first I have to ask you, Reverend Mother, how you are? Often I thought how did Reverend Mother get back home, or is she perhaps sick. I hope the dear Lord has accompanied you back to the Mother-house. I assume the Sisters were overjoyed but also a little curious about our well-being. We had a difficult time when you, dear Reverend Mother, left us. I think my heart wanted to burst and if I could have, I would have run after you. Yet the great sacrifice that I once made, I wanted and could, and shall also now not take back; on the contrary I thank the Lord every day for deeming me worthy of fulfilling the task. Every day I am more convinced that it is an undeserved blessing. By the grace of God and His help I will be grateful. Yes, dear Reverend Mother, I want to become holy no matter what. Humble, patient, gentle I always want to be no matter what place or time. God alone and above all, but also my dear Sisters and patients I want to serve lovingly.

About the whole voyage you have heard enough, dear Reverend Mother. We had some adventures, but the yearning to see land had risen to the extreme because we always hoped to arrive on Saturday and now it was Thursday. On Wednesday around 3:00 PM we could spot land. It was frightfully cold, but we did not leave the deck because our goal was ahead of us. We hardly slept the last night, at 7:30 I was up already but had to go back to bed.

Finally we entered the harbor, the boat anchored, the bridge extended, and in Jesus' name we were on solid ground in America.

The dear Sisters we had spotted from the ship and we greeted each other from afar. Sister Crispina and I were looking for her aunt, however could not recognize her from the ship.

I believe we both were the first ones who dared to cross the bridge and we had the great pleasure and privilege of finding her aunt. She knew us both. Then we followed the eight Sisters. The other Sisters had to take care of the luggage and could not get away, everything went with steam (?)

The Sisters were so nice to us, they could not have better provided for us. Four days, three to four times daily, they went to the harbor to see whether we arrived. Everything was prepared for us to stay a few days. All of them are so devout and good Sisters. I believe Sister Christina will write more.

Eight o'clock that evening we had to go to the train station where the other Sisters awaited us and also the Priest who was supposed to pick us up. The sailors wanted to see us once more and both officers came also and we all sang together ORSEN WISTISSIMA (?).

It took a little while until the train left; quite a number of Sisters had accompanied us to the station. We had a compartment for ourselves, the Coesfelder Sisters, the two Franciscan candidates and we 20 Sisters.

The cars are quite different from Germany; everything is upholstered and you can open up the benches and lie down to sleep, which we did. In the middle is an aisle where one walks about. Two stoves were in the compartment which burned day and night.

Finally, Saturday night at 6:30 we arrived in Alton, pronounced ALTEN, where the Vicar General received us. Four carriages were ready for us. Slowly we ascended to Alton which is quite high. The whole city is like hills and dales. How it is located and built you cannot visualize. I felt sorry for the poor horses and many times I thought we would tip over. Presently we stopped before the cathedral. We lined up and went up to the communion bench where we sat on the benches. The church was lit up and on the altar twelve candles were lit. Besides six gas lamps.

On the two side altars lamps and a lot more in the church. I don't know how many.

Then came the Most Reverend Bishop with other Priests, went up to the high altar knelt down and prayed, I have to add that when we entered the organ played lovely music and His Eminence came up to the communion bench. Sit down, he said; I receive and welcome you to Alton. Be welcome in the Diocese and also in the city. Renew your sacrifice which you made when you had to leave everything which on this earth meant something to you to travel to America. Renew the large sacrifice and if you faithfully pursue your profession, I'll promise you shall not repent it. We want to thank God now for the sacrifice you made, for the happy journey and that you are here now and for everything good we have received from Him.

We want to sing the TeDeum now and then I shall bless you. Then they will show you the house where for a few days you can rest together.

Then the Bishop went to the altar and with a full voice started the TeDeum, which the Bishop, alternating with the four or five Priests, and accompanied by the organ, sang. After that the Bishop went up to the altar and sang beautifully the blessing.

The emotions we felt I cannot describe. We all had joyful and melancholy feelings. During the TeDeum we all, I believe, sank to our knees instead of getting up and I think most of them shed tears.

Then came the Vicar General, the Priests, Father Sauer who picked us up, and we went to the house where we still are. There everything was ready for us, the table set, the beds made, and in all rooms a nice fire burned in the fireplaces. We went to the kitchen quickly next morning; at six o'clock we were in the church for confession. Then the Vicar General led us to the first benches so that all parishioners could see us. The Holy Mass

which the Most Reverend Bishop conducted, began. During the Holy Mass and the Gospel there always is a homily which the Most Reverend Bishop celebrated himself, of course always in English, of which we don't understand anything; only so much that he let us come, the Sisters, and how he wanted to place them. We always heard three Sisters, seven Sisters and that we are Hospital ~~Sisters and that the people should bring us something, which~~ they did the very same day. Then the Holy Mass was continued until Communion of the Priests. To us the holy bread was given by the Bishop. Finally after three weeks the Savior was given to us. Oh, the supreme happiness one experienced. One felt much better and to every sacrifice one said 'yes' and 'Amen'.

The first Holy Communion in Germany I received from a Most Rev. Bishop, Archbishop Paulus of Cologne, and the first Holy Communion in America again from a Most Reverend Bishop, therefore I have to become holy.

Then we went home, had coffee, everything was ready and then again we went to High Mass. Reverend Mother, there I wished you had been here. We did not understand what we heard; the chanting was beautiful, the Latin Mass was arranged for several voices, and everything well-timed, it was a gift from heaven. The Most Reverend Bishop was present. In the afternoon around two o'clock the Vicar General and Father Sauer came to tell us that the Most Reverend Bishop today at 4:30 PM would visit us to tell us how we would be placed. We were surprised that we would be sent to so many places. The Most Reverend Bishop together with the Vicar General came at 7:30 PM, he blessed us and asked us to sit down. Then he asked us how we are, if we had a difficult journey, The last few days he followed the news to find out which ships had capsized because we had not arrived. He admonished us to follow conscientiously the Rules and we would receive God's blessing. He asked whether three days would

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suffice to prepare for what would be necessary. He said we could be ready by Thursday. I would like to write more often but the others want also to write and my paper is used up.

The Most Reverend Bishop is very kind to us and how he cares for us, like a father he looks after us. When the first Sisters ~~travelled we had extra early Holy Mass. Afterwards he asked~~ the Vicar General to send three Sisters home and prepare breakfast and that everything would be ready so that the Sisters would not be late. Twice we have communed in the episcopal chapel. He is so good and holy.

Now we study English seriously. Every morning with book in arm we go from nine to eleven o'clock to the Ursulines. The Reverend Mother wanted us the whole time. She is so kind and informs us about some important things. We three learn a lot. She was born in Germany but is here more than twenty years. She knows the clergy and their habits and she tells us everything. She is so humble and always the same pleasantness. She excuses herself when she is five minutes late.

Dear Reverend Mother, twelve years ago she went with another Sister to Germany for collection (?) and there the late Sister Crisostima, Maria Stenge, her brother recommended us to you so very much. You came to us to stay with us. Our former Reverend Mother did not even come to you, although several times she prayed for it. She always excused herself; she had no time. Then they went to the late Bishop Johann Georg who graciously accommodated them and told them it would be too far from Muenster. They should stay with him which they did.

Dear Reverend Mother, the custom robe which you received twelve years ago in Germany, and which was then not new, they still used. Now a few weeks ago a Priest started a new congregation. The Vicar General said she should give the Priest the robe and a few things, so that he would have the essential items to be

able to read Holy Mass. They are that poor here in the church. They work and don't even know such things. The natives can neither sew nor knit. I have yet to see such nice Mass robes as we had in the Motherhouse. I need for the Ursulines a new one from the cathedral otherwise they have none. Rich they will not be and thank God we not either. Everything here is very expensive and the people want to have a good life. We shall not lack the pure necessities if we are good.

Reverend Mother, I know you like to give. If other Sisters should follow us, please give them what you don't need in the Motherhouse.

The Reverend Mother said the clergy like to pay for it, without remuneration we did not have to give it to them. Then, dear Reverend Mother, I hope we shall soon have the dear Savior in all houses. Only once a week the Holy Mass has to be celebrated here. One is allowed to have the holy Savior in the house. Oh, I wish we lived with the dear Savior under one roof, then we too could use some.

Father Sauer said it would be a shame if Bismarck would get everything. He has celebrated Holy Mass in the Motherhouse.

If you, dear Reverend Mother, had a nice stole for the Sisters, we would be grateful. They certainly deserve it. I would not know what to do; English is not that easy, as one assumed. The whole day, if we can spare the time, we study English. We already know a lot of words, dear Reverend Mother, but talking is another story. We cannot properly build a sentence. I always tell the dear Lord, he has sent us to America; he will give us the brains to learn the language, otherwise we cannot get along here. It is fortunate that the clergy and the Sisters are all so kind and friendly here. I think otherwise I would be homesick. My dear Mother, I cry often if I think of the dear Supervisors, then my tears flow. Both other Sisters already

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sleep for a long time and I can do nothing but cry. I hope it will improve, when we have work and will have our assigned house. But here in Alton we probably are the last ones in line since the Vincentians reside here. Now the Most Reverend Bishop contemplates a long time. Yet God's Will is Heaven, and the Lord's Will will be done.

Dear Reverend Mother, don't be cross with me, that I lamented to you, nobody understands me here and I believe it will improve. Don't let Sister Angelika know, she would be angry and that would not be good.

Dear Reverend Mother, pray for us and come and see us soon, but from Bremen, that works better and faster. It is late and, and I have asked myself if I could stay up and write.

Finally I wish you a very Merry Christmas and New Year. May the Lord keep you a long time for us and grant us to see you again, dear Mother.

If you only could write us a few lines, if only a good word, the joy would be great and not without good results.

Dear Reverend Mother, the whole ? of Sisters has prayed that I would write. I hope you, dear Reverend Mother, would permit it and then be kind enough to send her (?) I have some time and afterwards remain and Sister Severa must also have one and also the girl and several seamstresses (?).

I know it presents you with great joy, dear Mother. Earlier I could not do it because I had to cook for twenty Sisters.

Commending myself to your devout prayers, I remain affectionately

your you much loving

Sister Zosima

Many greetings to all Sisters.

For your efforts and care I send a prayer to St. Francis.

Greetings to Mr. Richters, R. Rump, W. Offenberger.

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Alton, December 5, 1875

Dear Reverend Mother!

The letter is still here and I want to add a few lines. I feel somewhat better; I don't want to cry any more. Sister Angelika and Sister Casiana travel to morrow to Springfield. Imagine please, Dear Reverend Mother, I am permitted to sew a wide beautiful sash for His Eminence and then I may take it to him. I am overjoyed; he is so kind. Then, when I arrive, I may kiss his Ring and when I leave I receive his blessing.

The letters are not ready. The people are on strike. I hope soon they will leave.

With 1000 kind regards, I am your you much loving

Sister Zosima

[illegible]

Ich habe Ihnen schon geschrieben, dass ich sehr gerne
 die Reise nach London machen würde, wenn ich nur
 die Zeit dazu finden könnte. Ich bin sehr beschäftigt
 mit meinen Geschäften und habe keine freie Minute.
 Ich hoffe, dass Sie auch sehr beschäftigt sind.
 Ich habe Ihnen schon geschrieben, dass ich sehr gerne
 die Reise nach London machen würde, wenn ich nur
 die Zeit dazu finden könnte. Ich bin sehr beschäftigt
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 Ich hoffe, dass Sie auch sehr beschäftigt sind.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

SR. ZOSIMA

*"Daily, dear Master, give to me
"The power to find and fill my task
"To labor and to live for Thee
"Is all I ask."*

She belonged to the exodus of the first gallant twenty, happy in the knowledge that she was deemed worthy and capable of helping to prepare the American soil for the expansion of the Order. All her mental and physical energies were spent for the attainment of this one object so dear and near to the hearts of these rugged pioneer Sisters. And how they toiled and moiled incessantly from early till late, those deeply furrowed time-scarred faces of the few surviving grand old Sisters eloquently tell us. Seeing and conversing with them, is as it were, getting a glimpse of another world, a world of resignation, peace and love. It lends to their lives a religious grandeur which the average worldling would never suspect. Our heroine—for such each one of them proved herself to be—was ushered into the world at Osnabrueck, February 25th, 1848, and was christened Maria. (Vahrenkamp). When twenty-one years old, her life's horoscope pointed in the direction of St. Mauritz. There as a member of the Sisterhood she sensed her mission which God had allotted her to fulfill. She applied and was admitted a postulant February 5, 1870, became a Novice Aug. 12, 1871, swore fealty to the banner of Christ and that of St. Francis, Aug. 31, 1872, which in turn was renewed Oct. 13, 1874 and again a year later.

Sr. Zosima acted as Superioress of Belleville and Eau Claire hospitals was recalled to Springfield and made a counsellor to Mother Marciana. Of a sunny and magnetic disposition she enjoyed a wide circle of friends and admirers who all sincerely deplored her death, which occurred February 10th, 1913. May she rest in God's holy peace.



