



Sr. Aquinas Weber

Birth: May 2, 1923

Death: N/A

Sister Aquinas was born Lucille Weber in the Kingsley/Hannah area, 15 miles south of Traverse City. She explained that her PO address was Kingsley, but her church and school were in Hannah. Her father, Jacob Weber, a farmer, and her mother, Anna, were married in the early 1900s and had 11 children. Lucille was one of two girls. The family's farm was part of a community of German Catholics.

In 1940 Lucille graduated from Saint Mary High School. Knowing only that she wanted to see more of the world, at 20 she moved to Detroit to be with friends and work for Parke-Davis. The pharmaceutical company was hiring at the time because of the large quantities of penicillin needed for the war effort.

In 1944, after much reflection, Lucille decided to explore her dual desires—becoming a teacher and joining the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids. Thus, she moved from Detroit to Marywood, in Grand Rapids. After a year of postulancy and novitiate training, Lucille became Sister Mary Aquinas Weber. Then in 1947 she graduated from Aquinas College with her bachelor's degree and was ready to begin her teaching career.

Sister Aquinas was first sent to Saint Stephen's in East Grand Rapids. Eight years later, in 1955, she was sent to a small country school in New Salem, MI, east of Holland. There she was not only a full-time teacher, but also the principal as well. The next year her assignment was in Saint Boniface, in Bay City. That school was bigger with 250 students.

The next year, Sister Aquinas was sent to Taylor, MI, southwest of Detroit. That school was challenging for her for two reasons: its size (1,000 students); and its mix of poor farm families and urban working-class families from the South who had moved to Detroit for the automobile manufacturing jobs. Six years later, in 1963, Sister Aquinas was called back to Grand Rapids to become the directress of novices at the House of Studies on Aquinas College campus.

Three years later, in 1966, Sister Aquinas was the delegate for the novices to the Chapter of Election for the Dominican Sisters. At 43, she was the youngest prioress ever elected by the Dominican Sisters. Because of radical changes in the Catholic Church (Second Vatican Council, 1962 – 1965), Sister Aquinas's six-year tenure was filled with both problems and possibilities.

In 1972, Sister Aquinas returned to school to complete her master's degree in Urban Studies at the University of Michigan. Knowing about her program, Aquinas College's President Norbert Hruby asked her to become the liaison between the college and Easttown neighborhood businesses. Because the neighborhood had been deteriorating for some time, in 1971, Hruby had called on several faculty members to study the neighborhood and find ways to reverse the deterioration. In 1973 he added Sister Aquinas to his team of community organizers. She worked on this project for 3 years. During this time, she also completed her master's degree.

In 1976 Sister Aquinas was elected treasurer of the Dominican Sisters and served in this full-time position until 1980. That year she accepted the invitation to become the first female board member of the Old Kent Bank and Trust Financial Corporation. At the time she was also serving on other boards, including Aquinas College, the Greater Grand Rapids Housing Authority, national and regional religious conferences. She served on the Old Kent board for 10 years.

From 1983 to 1988, Sister Aquinas was vice president of development at Aquinas College. From 1988 to 1991, she served as director of the Emeritus College (now known as Osher Lifelong Learning Institute). In 1991, Sister Aquinas was called back to the development department to help the college deal with a financial emergency. A year later, at 70 years old, Sister Aquinas retired as vice president of development and took the title "Chancellor Emerita." Since 1988, she had had the title of "Chancellor." In 2003, at 80 years old, Sister Aquinas retired as chancellor. Presently, she lives in Porter Hills Retirement Home and recently had heart surgery.

Rewards and Awards

Board Service from late 1970s to early 1990s

1990—Notre Dame Club annual honoree

Jewish National Fund Tree of Life award

1993—Aquinas College Reflection Award

1994 – 1998—Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton Award from Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati

National Kidney Foundation Galaxy Award

Grand Rapids Rotary Award

Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank Award

The Salvation Army Award

The Porter Hills Foundation Award

Hugh Michael Beahan Foundation Award

1999—Edward J. Frey, Sr. Distinguished Achievement Award from the Junior Achievement

West Michigan Business Hall of Fame

2003—President's Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals

Synopsis written by Falinda S. Geerling July 2013

2008—Honorary doctorate from Aquinas College

2012—Slykehouse Lifetime Achievement Award from the Economics Club of Grand Rapids
Papal Cross, *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*, from Pope Benedict XVI

Other Resources:

Aquinas College OLLI: <https://www.aquinas.edu/olli-aquinas>

Aquinas College Foundation: <https://www.aquinas.edu/foundation/staff-foundation-board>

Aquinas College Board of Directors: <https://www.aquinas.edu/board-trustees/board-trustee-members>

Awards:

<https://www.aquinas.edu/osher-lifelong-learning-institute-aquinas-college/aquinas-norbert-j-hruby-emeritus-award>

<http://www.afpwm.org/uploads/files/1987-2014%20Award%20Recipients.pdf>