

Victory Noll
Huntington, Indiana
February 24, 1986

Dear Sisters and Associates,

"When the evening of life comes, you will be judged on love."
St. John of the Cross

This morning, after the celebration of the Liturgy of Christian Burial, we laid to rest the remains of Sister Mary Whitfield and gave thanks to the Father for the beautiful reflection of his love in this quiet, reflective woman who was always so kind, thoughtful and supportive of others.

Sister Mary returned to the Noll from Ida, Michigan in 1968 after the Doctor had prescribed an early retirement. Sister's retirement simply took the form of different duties as she became helpful in the many activities and general household duties of Holy Family Community.

In 1945, Sister Mary's condition was diagnosed as the beginning of Parkinson's disease. Much later, she suffered from arthritis and arteriosclerosis which limited her activities in these last years, but Sister was always very helpful and cheerful to those who came to her.

It was only recently that Sister Mary needed more nursing assistance. In January, she became bedfast and needed total nursing care. In the last few weeks of her life, she ate and drank very little. Father Giles anointed her on Wednesday morning, February 19, and she died peacefully in the Lord in the early hours of Thursday, February 20, at 4:20 a.m. when Sisters Virginia Schmitt, Mary Karl and two of the nurse aides were present at her bedside.

Sister Mary spent her religious life in religious education in New Mexico, Texas, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Michigan. Thirty-five years of her religious life were spent in positions of authority in the missions and at Victory Noll.

When Sister Mary was here at Victory Noll in the mid-fifties as First Councilor, she collected thousands of S and H green stamps to purchase items for Holy Family Infirmary such as chairs for the reception room, the dining room dishes, card tables and all of the tan and black folding chairs which are still in use.

As I paged through the TMC, I noticed that Sister Mary had sent in many interesting articles of her mission experiences to the magazine. One was a good article about the missions of New Mexico at a time when twenty-nine Catechists covered large areas from the five centers of Las Vegas, Holman, Cerrillos, Anton Chico and Grants. The one about the lemon camps of Lemoniera, a mission of Santa Paula amused me. One of the Catechists from Santa Paula was instructing a class of First Communicants in one of the nine camps there. The day that Father came out to examine the children, she could not be present so another Catechist took her place. Father spoke to the children and tried to reassure them, but in spite of his gentleness, the words wouldn't come out. The next day when they assembled for class, their Catechist said to them, "You were afraid when Father tried to examine you yesterday, weren't you?" They answered, "Yes Catechist, but we weren't as scared as you. We came!"

Sister Mary was born December 4, 1901 in Stone City, Iowa. She entered the Community from St. Patrick's parish in Dubuque. She made first profession of vows May 24, 1928 just ten days after her mother died. That must have been a very difficult time for her. Sister celebrated her golden jubilee in 1976 and would have celebrated her diamond jubilee this summer.

Her brothers, Joseph, James and Edwin and her sister Grace all preceded her in death. Her niece Jackie with her husband Edward Novak of Lexington Park, Maryland and her nephew Richard Whitfield, his wife Carla with their son Brad from Rock Island, IL arrived Sunday evening for the funeral. They were with us until shortly after dinner on Monday. We appreciated their presence here.

The Liturgy of Christian Burial was celebrated by Father Giles, OFM, Cap. Richard and Jackie placed the pall on the casket, Sisters Joan Arnold and Mary Joan Ginsterblum did the readings, Sister Germaine Stadler did the Responsorial Psalm, Sisters Margaret Campbell and Mary Eleanor Clements brought up the gifts and Sister Virginia Schmitt said the prayers of commendation after the liturgy. Father Giles positioned his homily around the question, "Where do you live?", and suggested three places wherein most people live philosophically, religiously and spiritually. "It is here", he said, "that our motivation for life is generated and our value judgments formed." The three places suggested were (1) Between Bethlehem and Palm Sunday - where life is basically inconclusive; (2) Between Palm Sunday and Good Friday - with the conviction that evil has the upper hand; (3) This side of Easter - where good has not been defeated; wrong has not triumphed. God is in complete control. If Sister Mary could come back to us, Father could imagine Sister Mary saying to us: "Easter is more than a nice place to visit; it is a good place to live. Don't live in the cynicism between Bethlehem and Palm Sunday. Don't live in the despair between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Live in hope, this side of Easter and know the joy of living in the Year of Our Lord 1986."

During our Wake Service on Sunday evening, several of the Sisters shared their memories of Sister Mary. That thread that seemed woven through the whole tapestry of her religious life was her simplicity, her love, her supportiveness and the binding force which she was for many in the community. We are grateful and we thank you, Sister Mary, for your example of faithfulness to Jesus through Mary.

Always with love in Jesus and Mary,

Sister Germaine Stadler