



SISTER MARY FRANCES BARTSCH, OLVM

Sister Mary Frances, age 92, died on June 29, 2013 at Holy Family. Sister Martin Ksycki was with her as she slipped into eternal life and the glory of God.

Sister Mary Frances was born in Subiaco, Arkansas on October 5, 1920, the youngest of 10 children born to Louis Bartsch and Katerina Wagner Bartsch. She was baptized Frances Elizabeth on October 6, 1920 at St. Benedict's Church. Five brothers, Louis, Frank, Conrad, Fred, and George Bartsch, and three sisters, Rose Hudson, Gertrude Gibbs, and Teresa Brown, precede her in death. One sister, Sister Dominic Bartsch, S.Sp.S of Techny, Illinois, survives sister. She is also survived by her nieces and nephews, along with her Victory Noll sisters with whom she shared life and ministry for 70 years.

Sister Mary Frances celebrated 70 years in the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on May 24, 2013, having entered on October 28, 1943 and made first vows on August 5, 1946. She served in the missions in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado and Texas. Sister retired at Victory Noll in 2005 to volunteer. She graced many sing-along evenings and other events with her harmonica and loving smile.

Sister Mary Frances's last mission was in Luling, Texas and she often told the story that she arrived in Luling with the intention of retiring from active mission work in a year or two. Two weeks after she arrived, the announcement was made that she would be Director of Religious Education (DRE) for about 100 students. In truth the actual number was closer to 300. The program was in disarray and in much need of restructuring. Sister was happy to be of help and after a few more weeks, along with being the DRE, she became the "director of whatever else was needed." She worked to organize the lectors, Eucharistic ministers, altar servers, and choirs. To those duties she added the liturgical ministries she helped with spiritual needs at the hospital, three nursing homes and making visits to the sick in their homes.

It was only a few years later that the parish was without a pastor. Bishop John E. McCarthy came from Austin to size up the situation. He decided for the time being Sister Mary Frances would act as "pastor." She said, "Oh no, Bishop, I'm far too old for that." He replied, "You are only 75, aren't you? Here is my phone number to use any time of the day or night, in case you need me." He sent a priest for Sunday Mass every week. In a letter to Sr. Mary Frances in 2000, Bishop McCarthy wrote, "Our paths have not crossed for a long time but I am always conscious of the extraordinarily effective work that you have done at St. John's. You have seen many changes and problems and for all that, I am very grateful." He signed the letter, "Your brother in Christ".

When the new pastor came to the parish, Sister Mary Frances reflected on how God had been with her every step of the way, and on the supportive role of all the warm and friendly people of Luling who were so generous in sharing their talents and service. Then she said, "Now I can once again pursue that intended retirement in whatever way God will call me."

She loved her work in all her missions and Luling was only the last place. Even in her advancing age she cherished the ministry and the people. She wrote in a letter to Bishop McCarthy in 1997, "My life in Luling has always been fulfilling and I am so grateful to be able to continue to serve with whatever talents I still have at my age, for the honor and glory of God and the good of our people." While her plan had been to serve just a year or two before retiring, Sister Mary Frances served the community of St. John the Evangelist in Luling for 13 wonderful years.

In her file are other touching letters from pastors and friends who speak of her wonderful presence among them. I am sure that many of us share that memory of Sister Mary Frances, her warm inviting smile, her dancing eyes and her intense love of God through her life of service to God's people in her various places of ministry.

Sister Mary Frances's nephew, Gene Bartsch came from Oregon, nephew Lewis and wife Michelle Bartsch from Ft. Wayne along with her great niece Hailey Wade from Subiaco, Arkansas and great-grand niece Doris, from Indianapolis, Indiana. There were two sisters from Techny, Illinois, to represent her blood sister, Sr. Dominic. All these joined the community here at Victory Noll to celebrate the life and ministry of Sr. Mary Frances.

Sister Mary Frances had requested that "Ave Marie" be played on the violin before mass. Gene explained to the congregation that many in the family have played the violin, beginning with her grandfather and continuing with her father and two brothers along with Gene's son. That was a special remembrance of all of those who had loved and cherished the violin.

Fr. Thomas Shoemaker was the celebrant and homilist for the funeral. He spoke that you could tell Sister Mary Frances was a catechist by the choices she made in the readings. The first reading was on baptism, the gospel on Eucharist. "If she could have more readings we would go through all 7 sacraments," he said. He spoke of the faith that Sister Mary Frances taught and shared these 70 years and referred to her as a catechist, a title she held dear and truly treasured.

Sister Mary Frances, your time on earth has ended. May you now enjoy the reward that God has planned for you from the beginning.

In peace,

St. Dennis Downey OMR

