



## **SISTER VIRGINIA SCHMITT, OLVM**

Sister Virginia Schmitt quietly slipped into eternal life around 5:30 a.m. on Tuesday, May 6, 2014. She was surrounded by the nursing staff as they gathered to be with her before starting their morning routine. She had been alert the afternoon before and at the end she went peacefully home to God.

Sister Virginia was born in Chaska, Minnesota, at 4:30 p.m. on June 20, 1921 and baptized Virginia Matilda on July 3, 1921 at St. Mark Catholic Church in Shakopee, Minnesota. She was the seventh of 12 children of George J. Schmitt and Mary Margaret (Kreuser) Schmitt. She had three brothers, Raymond, Carl, and Harold Schmitt; and eight sisters, Alice Hammens, Lucille Williams, Dorothy Raser, Ethel Worm, Rose Mary Huss, and Lorraine Thielen, Harriet Pink, and Lois Kubes. She is survived by her sisters Harriet and Lois and many nieces and nephews.

Sister Virginia grew up on a dairy farm in Minnesota. Her family was close-knit and they would often sing songs or recite poetry as they did their daily chores, whether it was milking cows or doing dishes, both of which she would enjoy throughout her life. Living in the country and growing up on the farm, Sister Virginia knew God was close in the quiet of country mornings and in the beauty of nature's changing seasons. She lived the paschal mystery, long before she understood its meaning of life, death and resurrection. God's love gave her a strong desire to work with people, to help them appreciate the gift of self and the goodness of one another.

She attended school in a small, one-room rural schoolhouse with about 12 other students ranging from first to eighth grade. She went from this sheltered place where she knew everyone and she was the only student in her class, to high school where there were 50 in her class. She said she was shy, frightened and unable to speak in front of the class. Being able to speak in front of people became easier later, especially as she grew in her ministry with God's people.

Before entering the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, Sister Virginia was a long-distance telephone operator. She had the opportunity to go from Minnesota to San Francisco to help out with a shortage of operators during World War II. After the end of the war she left her job as a telephone operator and joined the congregation on November 27, 1946. She made first vows on August 5, 1949, and was sent to Salt Lake City, Utah. Three years later, she entered nurses training and there the wonders of medical science opened a completely new phase of her life. She did her initial training at St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing in Fort Wayne, Indiana, receiving her Registered Nursing degree in 1956. In 1959 she received her Bachelor's of Nursing from San Diego College for Women. She would also received a Master's degree in counseling from St. Francis College, in Fort Wayne in 1968. Sister Virginia served the people of God with her nursing ministry in Indiana, California, Missouri, Arizona, and Michigan.

Sister Virginia served the congregation as a leadership councilor from 1962 to 1968, as vice president from 1980 to 1984, as Administrator of Victory Noll from 1984 to 1987, and then Administrator of Holy Family Health Care Center until 1990. Sister Virginia also served in the Archdiocese of Detroit as a Pastoral Associate before retiring to Victory Noll in 2004.

She was drawn to the Community because of their work with those living in poverty and the idea of doing catechetics, home visiting, and health and social services. She would take all these and bring them into her ministry. She ministered first in Salt Lake City doing catechetical and home visiting. Her first nursing position was at an outpatient clinic in southern California where it was a challenge to bring the healing touch of Jesus to a broken and weary world. She also worked as a nurse for Victory Noll and in her duties she took care of Father Sigstein in his last few years while he was living at Victory Noll. In her time at Victory Noll, Sister Virginia shared her creative planning with the Sisters, initiating programs for their spiritual, physical, social and emotional well-being. She stretched this understanding of health to include mental health, and working among those who society often shuts away, while working in Kansas City, Missouri, with mental health services both at the State Mental Hospital, in public health clinics and outreach programs. She was fascinated by the holistic approach of health, allowing patients to remain in their own home settings while having services come to them. These home visits brought her in contact with the loneliness and isolation of older adults. She formed support groups to provide ways to deal with loneliness and feelings of rejection. Affirmation was the healing approach she believed in, and used it to serve those living in poverty. She gave love and spoke the truth as she witnessed to the Gospel message of God's love and concern for all including the most vulnerable among us.

Wherever Sister Virginia lived she entered into the life of the larger community, often serving on local, state and diocesan committees that helped to identify, address and educate on social justice issues that affected the common good and human dignity of all God's children.

Several of Sister Virginia's family joined the community for her wake and funeral, including her sister, Lois Kubes; her niece, Ann Swanson; and nephews, Mark Kubes, Dan Worm and Russell Worm, and Russell's wife, Jean. Three friends from Detroit's Good Shepherd Church, Mary Ellen Mc Caffery, Gayle Coyton and Judy Willis, also attended.

A prelude that Sister Virginia had requested, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Whistle Down the Wind*, was played before the funeral with Fr. Dale Bauman presiding.

Sr. Virginia, your gift of healing the people God will forever be remembered. May you now be welcomed with open arms into heaven by the one who first loved you.

With prayer and gratitude,



Sister Ginger Downey, OLVM

