

June 6, 2008

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family and Friends,

SISTER MADELINE DeGROOT had been living in Holy Family Health Care Center since the year 2000. She was suffering from memory loss and spent her days in the Camilla Center where the attention of our nurses and the various activities kept the sisters alert and interested in what went on around them. As her memory declined, she spent her days seated in a comfortable recliner. She was not able to respond or interact any more. She died peacefully on Thursday, May 29th at 5 AM. Sr. Martha Sijota was with her. Sister Madeline was 90 years old.

Madeleine (she spelled it differently on her application form) was born on February 18, 1918 in Little Chute, Wisconsin to Frank DeGroot and Anna Habermann DeGroot. She was the fourth of eight children: Lucille, Leslie, Leona, herself, Francis, Daniel, Florence and James. The first two children, Lucille and Leslie, died before Madeleine was born. Two sisters, Leona and Florence and two brothers, Francis and James, are still living.



Madeline attended eight years of grammar school and two years of vocational school. She then did housework for one year. When she was only seventeen, she applied to Victory Noll and was accepted in 1935. She joined ten other young women who also entered that year. When she became a novice, she received her religious name: Janet.

The years of formation passed quickly and the class pronounced first vows on August 21, 1938. Madeline saved a copy of her vow formula, probably because it had been signed by Archbishop Noll. That year was also historic because our congregation elected its first superior general and our founder, Fr. Sigstein, stepped down as director of the Society.

Madeline was sent to California for her first three mission assignments (Redlands, Ontario and Brawley). She made her final vows in 1945 in Redlands. In 1946 and 1947, she came back to Indiana (San Pierre and East Gary). Then it was back to California (Ontario, Monterey, Brawley, San Pedro and Redlands). As the years passed, she continued ministering in religious education in numerous places: Indiana, Utah, Colorado, New Jersey and Kentucky. From 1969-1971, she received permission to care for her brother in Appleton, WI. She had been helping him during the summers caring for his children after his wife had died.

Her interest in nursing must have begun during the time she spent at her brother's home. Since our congregation's three-pronged ministry included nursing as well as religious education and social work, Madeline began her studies in Covington, KY to prepare herself to become a Licensed Practical Nurse. She received her Kentucky license in 1973 and began her new ministry. She kept her license current even when she moved to Florida and later to Indiana. In Indiana she helped in our nursing department at Victory Noll for three years. In all, Madeline was an LPN for 23 years. However, she was still able to continue in religious education and pastoral ministry, depending on where she was missioned, as was the case in Missouri and Florida. Another interesting assignment that she especially liked

was being assistant manager in a senior living facility in Appleton, WI. The “Keen Ager’s” Project used empty convents in various places and refitted them for assisted living. It was a beautiful effort to use existing facilities and at the same time serve the needs of people in the area. Madeline did her part to help things run smoothly.

Throughout her religious life, Madeline studied to be well prepared for her ministry. She received her GED in 1967 and was in the upper 14th percentile. She attended summer classes at Victory Noll for six years. She then studied full time at Brescia College in Owensboro, KY and also took additional classes during the summers. In 1976, at age 58, she received her BA in Sociology. Records show that she then attended classes at St. Norbert’s in DePere, WI for various summers. She received a Certificate from St. Norbert’s Theological Institute in 1981. Her desire and dedication to continuing education was very evident.

There was one area in her life, however, that caused Madeline much suffering. It was the changes in the Church and religious life that took place after Vatican II. She found it very difficult to accept them. Finding no solution to her inner turmoil, she decided to join a new group being formed in northern Wisconsin. She was 79 years old at the time. The leadership team was concerned but assured Madeline that she would always be a member of our Congregation and would always be welcomed back. After two years, Madeline decided to return to Victory Noll. All of us were happy to have her among us again.

Madeline spent the last eight years of her life in Holy Family Health Care Center. She participated in the various activities as she was able. As her health failed, she was surrounded by the affection and care of our nursing staff and our sisters. She seemed to be at peace.

We laid Madeline to rest on Tuesday, June 3rd. No one from her family was able to come for the funeral. It was an overcast day but in the chapel there was light. The prayers and the music proclaimed faith in eternal life, a faith that Madeline had always held strongly, with a fierce devotion. We joined our faith with hers as we prayed:

*Compassionate God,
we entrust our Sister Madeline to your mercy.
You loved her greatly in this life.
Now that she is freed from all its cares, give her happiness and peace forever.
The old order has passed away for her; welcome her now into paradise
where there is no more sorrow, weeping or pain
but only peace and joy
with Jesus your Eternal Word and the Holy Spirit forever and ever.
Amen.*

Sincerely in Christ,



Sr. Melanie Persche, OLVM
General Secretary