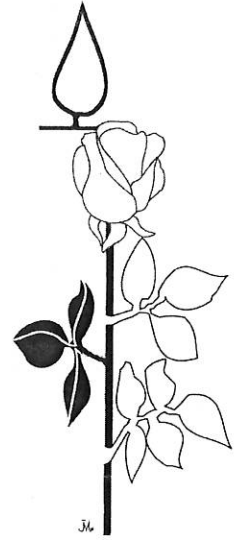


November 29, 2007

Dear Sisters, Associates, family and friends,

SISTER MARY LAWRENCE ROCHEL had been living in Holy Family Health Care Center since 1992. She enjoyed sitting at the typewriter, writing to her many friends and copying jokes for them. Her energy level slowly diminished. In October, she spent a few days in the hospital. After returning to Victory Noll, she needed to rest most of the time. Her heart became weaker and she died of heart failure at 1:30 PM on Tuesday, November 20th. She was 89 years old.

Mary Lawrence was born on October 8, 1918 in Fidelity, KS to Joseph and Elizabeth Buser Rochel. She was baptized Gertrude. There were ten children in her family: Joseph (who became a Jesuit) and his twin sister Mary (who joined the Benedictine Sisters of Atchison, KS, *Sr. Walburg*), Clara, Agnes (who joined the St. Joseph Sisters of Wichita, KS, *Sr. Cyprian*), Rosalia, John (who died shortly after birth), Margaret, Anthony (who became a Jesuit), herself and Suitberta.



Having four older siblings in religious life put a certain pressure on Mary Lawrence. Her pastor asked her which convent she was going to join. She became angry and answered "None." However, she had to prove to herself that she did not have a vocation. She wrote to various congregations, putting her sister's name on the return address. Her sister became angry, thinking the pastor had sent her name in. Mary Lawrence read the literature secretly. She was still not convinced until she came across our magazine, *The Missionary Catechist*. She knew she had found her vocation.

She entered Victory Noll on August 10, 1937 when she was almost 19 years old. In June of 1940, while in the novitiate, she was allowed to go home for the ordination of her oldest brother, Joseph. It must have been a wonderful family celebration. Then, on August 5th of that year, she and eight other novices made their profession of vows.

Mary Lawrence's first mission assignment was Winnemucca, NV. She went there by train and on the trip she overheard two men talking: "*It must be easy to love your neighbor here. They live so far apart.*" In fact, the population of Nevada was one person per square mile.

One of the challenges of missionary work in Nevada was the long trips to teach small groups of children. The sisters put 3,000 miles on the car each month. Many of the trips were over washboard roads, fifty miles one way, ninety miles another way. They would often leave at 6 AM and return at 6 PM. The sisters received a stipend of \$10 per month for their work. Sister Mary Lawrence wrote down many stories from those times, including flat tires, home visiting where people were afraid of them and talked with them through locked screen doors, a child on hearing that Sister was going to teach 3rd grade once again, said she was sorry that Sister had not received a passing grade, and many more. In fact, Mary Lawrence had thirty-seven typed pages of stories. Several years later, she entertained all of us at a community gathering, telling stories with a "poker face" until we were in stitches!

Sr. Mary Lawrence spent twelve years in Winnemucca. This was most unusual since sisters were moved from mission to mission very frequently in those days. Then, in 1952, she was assigned to Brawley, CA where the heat reached 120 degrees in summer and 30 degrees in winter. It was close to the Mexican border and many people were Spanish-speaking. Mary Lawrence never quite mastered Spanish but she loved and served the people during the seven years she spent there.

Her next assignment was Redlands. This was our center house in southern California and many sisters lived there, ministering over a large geographical area. They taught children of all ages, trained teachers and organized the religious education programs in the parishes. Those were busy years. One summer, Mary Lawrence was assigned as head cook. Never having had to cook for such a large group, she asked her assistant how many cans of tuna to open. Not knowing that her assistant didn't have any experience either, they prepared the meal. When they served the tuna, the sisters thought that they were appetizers. Needless to say, everybody ate a lot of bread that day!

In 1963, Mary Lawrence was missioned to Richmond, KY but after two months, was transferred to Flemington, NJ. After one year in New Jersey, she was sent to Elko, NV. With such frequent moves, it looked like missionary life was back to "normal." Mary Lawrence worked in Elko for three years and was then sent to El Paso. She spent two years there and was also the bookkeeper for the mission house, a job she enjoyed. She was then sent to Santa Fe for one year and had the new experience of working in three Indian Pueblos and in the women's prison. During that time, she also finished her studies and received a Certificate in Religious Education.

In 1970, Mary Lawrence volunteered to help at Victory Noll in the finance department. She had done some private studying in accounting while in El Paso and fit right in with her new duties. Three years later, the finance department got a computer and Mary Lawrence's job was "downsized." She didn't mind because her next assignment was Powell, WY.

She worked in Powell from 1973 until 1992, almost twenty years. In 1976, Sr. William Ann Maloney joined her. Again, there are stories galore. One couple had their marriage blessed in the convent chapel and Mary Lawrence and William Ann were bride's maid and best "man." Another time, the pastor brought over a young Jewish girl who needed lodging overnight. It was Christmas Eve. One time, a young sister in full habit came to the door, asking to stay for a while. They had their doubts but let her in. It turned out that she had "borrowed" the habit and was running away from home. There were many back-door guests. The sisters asked them to cut the grass or clean the yard before giving them food. The sisters almost asked the same thing of two priests who came looking for the pastor! And the stories go on.

The people of Powell loved the sisters and were very good to them. The feeling was mutual. When Mary Lawrence broke her hip in 1991, however, she knew it was time to return to Victory Noll. With many fond farewells, the two of them left Powell in March of 1992. Sr. Mary Lawrence was 74 years old. She spent the last fifteen years of her life volunteering at Victory Noll and serving as long as she was able. She was the last one of her immediate family to die. We laid her to rest on Saturday, November 24th. Her brother-in-law, Leonard Burdick and his son, Robert were able to come from Kansas to be with us.

Among Mary Lawrence's papers was a quote: *"Our lives on earth are like a journey without maps. We do not have a clear picture of what is happening nor what is going to happen."* Mary Lawrence did not have a map nor did she have a clear picture but she trusted in God. We rejoice with her because, walking the path of faith, she has reached her goal. May her joy be without end in the loving arms of God.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Melanie".

Sr. Melanie Persche, OLMV
General Secretary