



SISTER MARY JOSEPHINE MAES, OLVM, was born at home in Cieneguitas, New Mexico, on July 20, 1929, the third of 12 children of Juan and Guadalupita Anaya Maes. She was baptized Maria Josefina on August 4, 1929, at Guadalupe Catholic Church, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Sister Mary Jo, as she was fondly known, slipped into the embrace of God on Friday evening, March 5, 2021.

One brother, Michael Maes, and two sisters, Connie Howley and Marie Roybal, all of Santa Fe, New Mexico, survive Sister Mary Jo. Two brothers, Eloy and Gilbert and six sisters, Susie Maes, Dora Rodriguez, Irene Dowrey, Caroline Maes, Isabel Trujillo and Manuelita Vigil, all precede her in death.

Sister Mary Josephine graduated from Loretto Academy in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in May of 1948. She worked as a typist and bookkeeper for several companies before entering the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on September 6, 1950. She made first vows on August 5, 1953, and her first local community was in Los Angeles, California, at Saint Basilio. Over the next 60 years, she would serve in three other states — New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. She spent the majority of her religious life in Southern California, working in all areas of Religious Education from young children to adult formation, including campus ministry for college students. In 1975, she earned her Master's degree in Religious Education from Seattle University in Seattle, Washington.

Sister Mary Jo worked in Catholic parishes, many with large catechetical programs for students who did not attend Catholic schools. An example was the program at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in El Centro, California, where she was the Director of Catechetical Ministry for seven years. At Our Lady of Guadalupe parish, she was responsible for 35 volunteer teachers, classroom aides and office staff along with 650 students. Most of these students were children of farm workers who worked in the surrounding fields.

In 1999, when Sr. Evelyn Mourey returned to Bolivia in South America, Sister Mary Jo returned to El Centro to replace Sister Evelyn in providing religious education to children living in the Posada del Sol apartment complex and later to work in the outreach center, "Centro Siempre Aprendiendo," which in 2008 became the Sister Evelyn Mourey Center. Sister Mary Jo served as co-director of the center along with Sr. Maria Luisa Valdez. As co-director, she continued her many activities including visiting the sick and homebound, weekly adult prayer groups, and religious education classes for elementary students and parent formation. She also offered crafts for the students each week and taught English classes, along with assisting to provide social services to Hispanic migrant workers. All these activities kept her busy and very happy as she was engaged with the people of the area.

Sister Mary Jo enjoyed playing cards and had wonderful sense of humor. Her favorite card game was pinochle, however, when she came back to Victory Noll in 2007 she learned the card game “500” because few knew how to play pinochle. One of her regular card-playing friends said, “She loved playing ‘500’ and would always be at the table before anyone else.” She was the first to arrive and the last to leave. Another one of Sister Mary Jo’s pastimes was the “tea at three” group. Along with two other Sisters, she would meet each afternoon at 3 p.m. for tea or coffee and conversation. They would welcome others from time to time, yet those three were the regulars who shared the news of what was happening around Victory Noll. It was another wonderful way of being with each other and sharing life.

The rules during the COVID-19 pandemic have forced us to change our usual rituals of a vigil and a Eucharistic liturgy. In this different atmosphere, we brought Sister Mary Jo’s earthly remains to the Our Lady of Victory Chapel on March 11, 2021, the same chapel where she had professed her first vows and started her journey as a Victory Noll Sister. The funeral liturgy was livestreamed for her family, friends and the Victory Noll Sisters who live beyond Victory Noll.

Sister Rose Ann Kaiser gave the eulogy for Sister Mary Jo. Sister Rose Ann told the story of how when they both lived in Coachella, California, in the mid 1960’s, the two of them had spent a day in San Diego. Sister Mary Jo deliberately waited until after dark to start the drive back to Coachella so that they could experience the glory of God shining above them in the brightness of the stars and then see the lights glowing from the desert floor. “We were surrounded by God’s glory above and below us. Mary Jo was wonderful at creating situations that were alive and shining with the presence of God.”

As the service for Sister Mary Jo ended and we commended her soul to God, each person present blessed the coffin with holy water. We did not send Sister Mary Jo out from this chapel to do ministry. We sent her home to God, where she will be welcomed for her faithful service, her love, and for her ability to create situations where God’s glory is recognized in the natural beauty that surrounds us daily.

With gratitude and blessings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sr. Ginger Downey, O.L.V.M." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr. Ginger Downey, OLVM