

April 9, 2011

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family and Friends,

Sister Geraldine Kirkessner was being assisted in getting ready to go to breakfast when she suffered a couple of seizures. The nurse was attending her when she stopped breathing. Sister Geraldine went quickly and peacefully home to God at 6:55 a.m. on March 29, 2011. Geraldine's health had declined in recent months. She had surgery for a perforated ulcer and was recuperating on the third floor of Holy Family building. Although the surgery was successful, Jerry was having a hard time bouncing back. The staff and Sisters were encouraging Jerry to eat better and to try to become more active. Her brother Jim and sister-in-law Marge came to visit Jerry in March. They were able to have her come to meals with them and visit in the dining room and lounge. However, they could see a big change in her energy and stamina since they last saw Jerry. While with Jerry they too encouraged her in the healing process. God had other plans for Jerry, total healing and fullness of life in Christ.

Sister Geraldine was born August 27, 1926 to Andrew and Catherine (Garnet) Kirkessner. She is survived by one brother, James P. Kirkessner of Lancaster, Pa. Her parents and brother Andrew C. Kirkessner preceded her in death.

Sister Geraldine entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on October 27, 1945. She made her first Profession of Vows on August 5, 1948 at Victory Noll, and her Perpetual Vows on August 5, 1954 in Middlesex, N.J.



Jerry served God and others in the Missions of Michigan, Kentucky, New Jersey, Florida, Indiana, California, Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, Utah and Arizona. She retired to Victory Noll in 2007. She began her Mission years as a Catechist and soon became very proficient and knowledgeable in the field. She had earned a degree in Theology from St. Mary's College, Winona, Minn., that prepared her for her ministry in Catechetics. She loved teaching and sharing her faith in God's word, the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the teachings of the Church. Jerry prepared other Catechists to serve in the teaching ministry of the Church, and did so in many parishes and Catholic High Schools, especially in Denver, Colo. Sister Geraldine was one of the pioneers in establishing the Religious Education Office in Los Angeles in the 60's. She worked there in forming lay Catechists and developing the CCD curriculum, including special courses for those teaching children with special needs. Just recently Jerry mentioned that she was among the creators who came up with the idea of having a yearly Religious Education Congress for CCD teachers and volunteers. This congress continues though it has moved to Anaheim Convention Center in Orange, Calif. The number of attendees has grown each year and this year's congress, which was held in March, numbered over 30,000.

In the 1970's Jerry's ministry took a new direction. She felt called to prepare to minister in the Pastoral Care and Counseling field. She had a great compassion for those suffering from mental health problems and various addictions. She wanted to reach out to them as an instrument of God's love and healing. Jerry studied Clinical Pastoral Education at Osawatomie State Hospital in Kansas. She was certified as a Pastoral Associate, Mental Health Care from U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington DC. Following her training, Jerry became a mental health Chaplain at Osawatomie Hospital in Kansas. She continued ongoing education and training by attending workshops, institutes, and seminars in the field of therapy, pastoral counseling, mental health, care for those with addictions, burnout, and family

therapy. Jerry developed support groups for women giving them the opportunity to work through issues among themselves. She developed support groups for divorced and widowed women as well as children of the divorced. She was a healing presence to those suffering from addictions and mental problems.

At Kansas State Prison in Lansing, Mich., she was honored with a plaque for her ministry as instructor of the corrections officers and security officers who were training there.

Sister Jerry expressed beautifully in the following words, how she saw herself living out the mission of Jesus as a Victory Noll Sister. "I believe that my ministry as a Mental Health Pastoral Associate is a participation in God's care. Christian ministry as portrayed in the Gospels is a story of human encounters, of being present, being with people wherever they are. Christ was a pastor, a shepherd, an instrument of peace, an enabler of grace. In imitation of him, I strive to make my pastoral presence and caring the same. I see my ministry as the weak, human witness of my own suffering life and personal struggles with faith, hope and love.... What better way could one choose to lay down one's life for one's friend?"

At the time of her death, Jerry's mission group was having their meeting at El Carmelo Retreat House in Redlands, Calif. We lamented that Jerry could not be with us and were writing her a card expressing how we missed her. After we received word of her death the eight of us gathered in a circle on March 30 and had a memorial service for Jerry. At this service we shared our memories of Jerry, and the ways she touched our lives. The card we had written to her we gave to her brother, Jim.

At the Vigil Service on Friday evening, Sister Jerry's brother, Jim and sister-in-law Marge, her brother, Andy and his wife Margaret and Jerry's friend Sister Anna Marie Kane, BVM from Chicago were present. Sister Lucille gave a eulogy highlighting Sister Geraldine's many ministries and accomplishments. After quoting Jerry's words that we noted above, Lucille ended by saying, "We are grateful, Sister Geraldine, for your faithful service in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. We rejoice that you now share with all the Saints eternal life with God."

After the service, we went to the dining room for refreshments and to continue sharing our memories of Jerry. The key themes from the general sharing was that Jerry truly carried out the OLVM Charism in the Mission of Jesus, was an excellent Catechist, had a great concern for the poor, the needs of women and those on the margins, had a great sense of humor and was a fun person to be with.

Sister Jeanette sent an e-mail stating that Sister Geraldine was a special person in her life. She states, Jerry was a catechist par excellence and in Jeanette's first mission, Jerry taught her a great deal about being a catechist and a teacher of catechists. Jeanette also recalled Jerry's great sense of humor and love of baseball. She said last summer the Chicago Sisters invited Jerry to a Cubs' game that she thoroughly enjoyed despite the fact they were soaked by a downpour of rain. Finally, Jeanette spoke of Jerry's love for her family.

Sister Alma shared how Jerry came to visit for three days in Phoenix, found a ministry while there, and her visit turned into 10 years in the area. Alma said she was a great companion throughout those years.

Andy's wife, Margaret shared that Jerry visited family two times a year and stayed with them. She said they had such good times with Jerry and two different times Jerry went on a trip to Europe with Andy and Margaret.

Sister Anna Marie met Jerry 24 years ago and they continued their friendship over the years. She visited Jerry at Victory Noll, Detroit and Phoenix. She states that during those years she had a great time with Jerry and learned a great deal about her family.

Sister Lorraine, a classmate of Jerry's, met her in 1945 when they entered Victory Noll. Lorraine was number two in the class and Jerry was number three. She never let Jerry forget that she was number three. She teased Jerry a lot and Jerry took it graciously.

On Saturday April 2, 2011, we celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial. Sister Geraldine's brother Jim, his wife Marge from Lancaster, Pa., her brother, Andy and his wife Margaret from Lancaster, Pa. and her friend Sister Anna Marie Kane, BVM from Chicago were present. After the sprinkling with Holy Water, Sister Lorraine and Sister Ann Shirley placed the Pall and the Crucifix on the Casket. Sister Geraldine's family Jim, Marge, and Margaret brought up the Gifts at the Offertory. Geraldine chose Matthew 25:31-40 for the Gospel at her Funeral Mass.

Father Fahey in his Homily said that Sister Geraldine expected to be one of those sheep on Christ's right hand in His Kingdom. Father said that Sister Geraldine spent a great part of her life visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, and helping those who could not help themselves. Jesus said, what you did for these least sisters and brothers, you did to me. Father said that Sister was the Church in action. She brought God's love to many people. Jesus tells us those who care for others' needs will be with Him and His Father forever.

After Mass, we processed to the cemetery where we laid Sister Geraldine to rest with the final prayers, blessing of the casket, and the singing of the hymn to Mary, Tu Eres La Victoria. A delicious dinner to celebrate Jerry's life followed.

Sister Geraldine we thank you for your life among us. You have fought the good fight, you have won the race, Now Jesus says to you, well done good and faithful servant, receive the joy of the Lord whom you have loved and served so faithfully.

Sincerely in Christ,

Sister Betty Anderson, O.L.V.M.

Sister Elizabeth Anderson, OLVM
General Secretary