



SISTER MARY ELLEN DESCOUROUEZ, OLVM, 86, died on October 9, 2021, at Saint Anne Communities at Victory Noll, Huntington, Indiana.

Sister Mary Ellen was born in Geneva, Illinois, on January 21, 1935, to John Descourouez and Helen Heisten Descourouez. Her parents and two brothers, Robert and William Descourouez all precede Sister in death.

Sister Mary Ellen was baptized on February 10, 1935, at Saint Patrick's Catholic Church in Saint Charles, Illinois. Her family lived on the southside of Chicago for a short time and were staunch White Sox fans. She said that she received her first call to religious life while attending a White Sox game in Comiskey Park when she was around five or six. There she was amazed at the number of people and in her young mind and heart wondered how many knew that Jesus loved them or knew of Jesus at all!

The family soon moved back to Saint Charles and after graduating from Saint Mary's Academy on June 3, 1952, the question turned to from "do these people know about Jesus?" to "who will tell them about Jesus?" She worked in an office while she continued to discern this question and her call to religious life. One day, her pastor told her a friend of his sister, Marie Wellnitz — our Sister Paula — had entered a young congregation that might be where God was calling her. After a visit to Gary, Indiana, to meet the Sisters, she knew she had found her new home. The Sisters were very welcoming and had a sense of humor laced with joy. They showed a sense of simplicity and missionary spirit among the poor and marginalized. Within a few short months, on January 6, 1953, Mary Ellen entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters. It remained special to Sister Mary Ellen that she had entered on the Feast of the Epiphany, the celebration of God's revelation to all people.

Sister Mary Ellen made first vows on August 5, 1955, and after her home visit, she was off to Colorado Springs, Colorado, to join the other Sisters ministering there. In her first 10 years as a Victory Noll Sister, Sister Mary Ellen's ministry focus was religious education. As circumstances warranted, Sisters were given the opportunity for higher education. Sister Mary Ellen received her Bachelor's Degree from Siena Heights College in Adrian, Michigan, and received her Master's Degree in Theology from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This degree in theology began her life-long passion of reflecting on the scriptures and opened her to new ways of looking at the church and world. Both served Sister Mary Ellen well in the ministry of formation, which she assumed in the United States and later in Bolivia.

Sister Mary Ellen spent 10 years in Bolivia from 1976 to 1985 serving as a pastoral minister and in religious education. She learned to speak both Spanish and Quechua to be a more effective minister to the people of Buena Vista. She continued to use her

Spanish even after returning to the United States. She was back in her hometown of Chicago ministering to the immigrant population. She once said, “Once you let Chicago under your skin, you may never get it out of your heart.”

There was also an urgent need for a personal welcome to the recent arrivals from Mexico. One creative way Sister Mary Ellen met people was by doing laundry in the neighborhood laundromat. This outreach placed Sr. Mary Ellen in contact with many who worked hard in the hope of a better life. In those laundromat encounters and in her many home visits, Sister Mary Ellen learned first-hand of the many needs of the people. With this knowledge, and after the consolidation of parishes, she and three other Victory Noll Sisters founded Julia Center to meet some of these needs and to listen to the stories of the people.

In 1996, the congregation called Sister Mary Ellen to serve on the Leadership Team. She served one term before returning to Bolivia, this time to Cochabamba, for six years. She returned to Victory Noll in 2009 and one of her volunteer ministries was to write a weekly reflection on the Gospel in both English and Spanish for the OLVM website.

All who knew Sister Mary Ellen knew her as a quiet reflective person with a deep love and appreciation for Mary, our blessed mother. Sister Mary Ellen grew to recognize Mary as a “faithful disciple and friend to us all” — a line from her poem, *Tu Eres La Victoria*, which became one of our congregational songs. Another talent most associated with Sister Mary Ellen was her delicate tatting, which graced many homemade greeting cards and Christmas trees.

The Congregation gathered on October 11, 2021, to begin our formal goodbye to Sister Mary Ellen with a vigil service, followed by the funeral liturgy on October 12, 2021, celebrated by Father Dale Bauman. As the final farewell, those at the cemetery once more sang the words she had written in tribute to Our Lady of Victory.

Sister Mary Ellen, you also were a “woman of peace, a woman of prayer and a courageous disciple.” May you walk with Mary and Jesus; knowing you brought “The Word” of their love to many people throughout the United States and in Bolivia.

With gratitude and blessing,



Sr. Ginger Downey, OLVM