



SISTER GERTRUDE SULLIVAN, OLVM

Sister Gertrude died at Holy Family Health Care Center, November 6, 2012 at the age of 90. Several sisters were with her throughout the afternoon and early evening and then she slipped quietly away as nurses had stepped from the room and when they stepped back in Sr. Gertrude had released her soul into God's loving embrace.

Sister Gertrude was born in Kendall, Wisconsin, on July 1, 1922, the ninth of 17 children born to James Sullivan and Marie Langsdorf Sullivan. She was baptized Gertrude Frances on July 16, 1922 at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Kendall.

Sister was preceded in death by her parents, six brothers, William, Daniel, Jerry, Roger, Donald and Thomas Sullivan, and seven sisters, Kathryn Sullivan, Helen Schmitz, Louise Ducke, Lucille Schermerhorn, Myrtle Thomas, Dorothy Pipp and Carolyn Bertoline. She is survived by three sisters, Margaret Laufenberg, Marie Brueggen, and Mary Jane Giese, all of Wisconsin. She has numerous nieces and nephews who also survive her. Eleven members of her family were able to join the community for her vigil and funeral.

Her classmate, Sr. Irene DeMeulenaere, shared the story about how they met in Union Station (train station) in Chicago as they were both coming to Victory Noll to enter. They recognized each other by their black shoes. They both entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on October 27, 1949 and made first vows on August 5, 1952.

Sr. Gertrude was a faithful soul, a trusting soul in all her missions and ministry positions, where she served with a grace and fidelity. She taught religious and adult education in Michigan, California, Florida, Nevada, and helped in the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Clinic in Tucson, Ariz. Sister served as President of the Congregation from 1971 through 1977. She also served the congregation as Coordinator of Holy Family Building and as Administrator for Victory Noll.

Sr. Gertrude had many challenges in her years as a Victory Noll Sister. Sr. Alma Bill spoke of Sr. Gertrude's time as President and recalled, "Her six years as President were marked by tremendous changes which needed an even hand at the 'wheel.' She guided us through the renewal process and only God knows the stamina required to exercise leadership during those days." Sr. Jeanette Halbach also commented on her during this time. "Gertrude was very open to change and not afraid of it. She was a strong beacon, firm and compassionate."

Sr. Gertrude also took on challenges outside of the Congregation. One was saying yes after being invited by Bishop William McManus to be the first woman Associate Administrator for the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese. Sr. Gertrude said, “My role is to try to make it possible for people to share responsibility for decision-making, to see that action for justice and human rights becomes an active part of Catholic life.” Her work in the Diocese opened up the opportunity for talented and qualified women to share their vast experience within the church. Sr. Gertrude shared in any ministry or place where she was her gifts and talents in love and trust.

As family, friends and the sisters gathered for the vigil, Sr. Gertrude’s three nieces sang a prelude of “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” Sr. Rita Musante led the vigil service with Sr. Joan Arnold as reader and Sr. Alodia Carney giving the eulogy.

There were many lovely remembrance of Sr. Gertrude in the dining room after the vigil by both the sisters and her family. The three nieces sang, “When Irish Eyes are Smiling” and “My Wild Irish Rose” as part of the sharing of memories.

All the family members took part in the funeral. The music was led by Sr. Gertrude’s three nieces Kathy Wacker, Donna Elsen, and Carol Brueggen. Kathy also cantored the responsorial Psalm and Alleluia verse. Sr. Gertrude’s sisters, Margaret Laufenbert and Marie Brueggen, along with Marie’s husband Harry placed the pall, while Larry Laugenberg laid the crucifix. Sher Kamm and Gary Sullivan brought forth the gifts.

Father Fahey started his homily with these words, “People think of death as a great enemy. Hard to think of it as a friend, but maybe for Sister Gertrude, death was a friend. She had suffered so intensely and so long. She had lost her sight, so the moment of death must have been a beautiful experience for her.” Sr. Gertrude was the one who invited Father Fahey to become the chaplain for Victory Noll, in 1992 (21 years ago) and the two shared a special bond. He spent time visiting her over the years, especially these last few years when Sister was so confined.

We are grateful, Sr. Gertrude, for your continuing to say “Yes” to the challenges of a changing world, a changing Church and a changing Congregation. You served faithfully in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus, not only with your voice, but with your very life. May you now celebrate eternally the glory of God!

In the Peace of Christ,

Sr. Ginger Downey OLVM

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General Secretary

