

April 20, 1985

Victory Noll
Huntington, Indiana
April 20, 1985

Dear Sisters,

"Peace be with you; It is I, Alleluia; do not be afraid, Alleluia!"
Canticle of Zachariah - Sat. 2nd week/Easter

Today, on this Saturday dedicated to our Blessed Mother, Sister Bernarda Durkin, died peacefully in the Lord at 1:30 p.m. April 20, 1985. Her brother Joseph and his wife Marguerite had arrived from Chicago at 11:00 a.m. and were present at her bedside.

Sister Bernarda fell in her room on second floor on March 11th and then sometime during the night of March 12th, she suffered a stroke and fell two more times. When Sister Maria came on duty, she brought her to the third floor immediately. For a few days she looked as though she would recuperate as she regained her speech and walked a few steps, but shortly after she became progressively worse.

One afternoon as she was propped up in a geriatric chair, she called out: "O Blessed Mother, tell Jesus I want to go home!" There was silence and then she said: "Well, go ahead and tell Him!" Sister prayed constantly that she would be taken to the Father.

Father Don anointed Sister Bernarda on March 13th and on April 13th. On the morning of the 20th, he came up to give her a blessing. About a half hour before she died, some of the sisters came in to pray the rosary. After they were finished, they stepped out in the hall. Besides Joe and Marguerite, Sisters Marie Welter, Camilla Cray, Maria Fratto and Virginia Schmitt were with her when she died. Immediately, the others returned and Sister Virginia began the Memorial Service in her room. This is the service which Sister Elizabeth Ann Clifford wrote several years ago for those who donate their body to medical science. The pall is placed over the body, the body is sprinkled with holy water and very meaningful prayers are prayed for the departed sister. After the ceremony was finished, those present sang, "We have a Holy Mother," and then everyone departed quietly. Later, Mr. and Mrs. Hart arrived to take the body to Indianapolis.

It seemed as though Sister Bernarda waited especially for Joe and Marguerite. They had called a few days before to tell Sister Marie what time they would be here. They arrived on time and had been here so shortly, when Sister Bernarda slipped gently into the reality of eternity to meet the risen Lord! "Peace be with you; It is I, Alleluia!"

Joe and Marguerite left the Noll at 3:15 p.m. to drive to Kalamazoo to see Marguerite's brother who was quite ill. From Kalamazoo, they intended to return to Chicago.

I recall Sister Bernarda stopping off at Victory Noll from Chicago on her way to Redlands in the summer of 1947. That summer, we second-year novices put on a play about Father Serra's missions and our props were scattered all over the front hill area and also the area where the Holy Family building now stands. The weather was forbidding and all that day we prayed that it would clear up. Sister Mary Whitfield was praying for rain! She won! Right in the middle of

of the first act, the clouds opened up and the rain came down in torrents. The Council Members and Sister Bernarda, our guests, were drenched! But they were sports about it. The next year I was missioned to Redlands and Sister Bernarda was my first superior! We laughed many times over that evening.

While Sister Bernarda devoted most of her religious life to religious education, in the seventies, she changed to pastoral ministry among the aging, the shut-ins and the infirm. She worked up many meaningful prayer services which the people loved. Sister had a real heart for this kind of ministry and kept up a correspondence with quite a few of the elderly after she had returned to the Noll.

She was an excellent typist and through the years has offered her services whenever they were needed. During these last few years, she had made herself knowledgeable about public issues and wrote many letters to senators and representatives speaking out for justice and peace. Politics was kind of a natural for Sister Bernarda. Her brother Martin was made Secretary of Labor under President Dwight Eisenhower. He died an untimely death caused by a brain tumor.

Sister Bernarda was born August 10, 1902 in Chicago, one of eight children. She entered the Community from St. Brendan's parish in Chicago February 8, 1932, and made first profession of vows March 25, 1935 at Victory Noll. She celebrated her golden jubilee at Victory Noll August 5, 1982.

Father Don celebrated the Eucharist today for Sister Bernarda and tomorrow, Monday, April 22, 1985 he will celebrate her memorial liturgy. We thank you, heavenly Father, for the reflection of your love in Sister Bernarda, who appreciated life and gave herself untiringly for others. We thank you, Sister Bernarda for the example of your faithfulness through the years and we beg you to continue to intercede for this Community. Alleluia!

Sister Germaine Stadler