



SISTER IRENE DeMEULENAERE, OLVM, age 90, died Saturday August 17, 2013 at Holy Family Health Care Center.

Sister Irene was born at home in Poweshiek County, Iowa, on April 7, 1923 to August and Katherine (Michalek) DeMeulenaere. She was baptized Irene Catherine at St. Bridget's Catholic Church on April 22, 1923. She was preceded in death by her parents, three brothers, Francis, Vincent, and Bernard DeMeulenaere, and by two sisters, Sister Therese DeMeulenaere, M.M., and Evelyn Edelen. Surviving is one sister, Ruth DeMeulenaere of Victor, Iowa, many nieces and nephews along with her Victory Noll Sisters with whom she shared life and community for 64 years.

Sister Irene entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on October 27, 1949 and made first vows on August 5, 1952. She served in the missions in Nevada, Wyoming, New Mexico, California, Arizona, and Indiana. Sister returned to Victory Noll in 2003 to serve as a Coordinator for three years and then to volunteer as a Personal Needs Assistant and later as a volunteer in Holy Family.

In reviewing Sister Irene's mission cards telling of the places where she was missioned as a Sister, it is quite interesting to see that although she was in six states, she spent the majority of her ministry in just two places. She spent 11 years in Holbrook, Arizona, and 25 years in East Chicago, Indiana — "The Harbor" as she would often say. "The Harbor" was made up of five parishes, Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Patrick's, Holy Trinity, St. John Cantius and Assumption. Sister Irene served as director of the inter-parochial Religious Education program and then coordinated the Christian Communities Development program.

One of her most important endeavors was promoting environmental and social justice causes. Sister Irene believed her activism embodied the Victory Noll charism of working with the poor, fighting injustice and striving to improve the lives of all people. Her biggest challenge was getting the neighborhood people involved, helping them to understand that the issues were their issues and the need to own the issues, instead of just complaining about them. Many of her neighbors did not attend community meetings because they felt they were unheard, unwanted and helpless. She encouraged them to believe that they could make a difference by their actions and their involvement. In 1998, the City of Calumet recognized Sister Irene for her years of faithful service to the people of the harbor area by awarding her the "Calumet Community Hero" award, one of many awards and recognitions she received in her years of service and ministry. In a newspaper article about the award it was written, "Many times she is that behind-the-scene force that makes a project a sure success." *La Voz de Chicago*, 12/4/1998

In 1999, Sister Irene retired from active ministry after serving for 50 years as Director of Religious Education in various parishes, the last being the five harbor parishes. Sister Irene's "retirement" ministry became another full-time ministry in East Chicago, Indiana. She continued to be very involved in the community. She took pleasure in visiting the neighborhood. She would knock on doors and enjoyed the very rich diversity of the people she came to know. She also did a lot of hospital and homebound visitations, taking

communion to those unable to attend mass. She would visit with the people and because she had the time she could stay and talk for as long as was needed, often more than an hour. She felt it was very important for those who suffered tragedies to feel God's strength and love, so she decided to reach out to them in their mental and spiritual anguish through her visits showing them that someone did care about them and all that they had gone through.

In her kindness and generosity she touched so many people. In her file here at Victory Noll is a letter written by man who had been influenced by Sister Irene in Holbrook, Arizona. He wrote, "too often as the years go by we wait until it is far too late to let people know the impact that they had upon us. Therefore, albeit 37 years into my life I want to simply say, 'Thank You.'" He went on to say how Sr. Irene demonstrated leadership and showed him that he could make a difference.

In the sharing after the vigil on Tuesday evening, August 20, many talked about her kindness and the fact that she was involved in everything. She never knew a stranger and never believed anyone had a bad character. Sister Rose Ann Kaiser, who lived with Sister Irene in East Chicago, spoke about their time together with these words; "Irene was a quiet, powerful presence among the people and was greatly appreciated for her presence, her loving concern and her listening heart, whether they were people in power or a neighbor down the street."

Many also talked about her smile and that deep sense of calm. Angel Torres wrote a poem for Sister Irene's 50th anniversary. The last part reads: "The whole world knows you, Sister Irene. The smile that you radiate all above you. It is healing and it is peace. It is joy that you give: this is your gift."

In the homily at the Eucharist celebration for Sister Irene on Wednesday, August 21, Father Fahey made two comments that spoke very clearly of Sister Irene. The first was that "heaven means that you totally belonged to God." She certainly demonstrated that with her life. The second comment was that, "she loved God, loved creation and loved her family." This too was evident by her life. Her family loved her as well. Many came to celebrate Sister Irene's life and bid her farewell, yet believing she is with them still in the memories and in their hearts.

You have gone from our presence, but you will be with us always. You have touched our lives and we will never be the same. Go now, God's faithful servant and enjoy the place that God has prepared for you.

In God's love and mercy,



Sr. Ginger Downey, OLVM

