

All for Jesus through Mary

Victory Noll  
May 28, 1976

Dear Sisters,

"I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart . . . I will betroth her to myself forever, betroth her with integrity . . . justice . . . tenderness . . . love . . . and faithfulness and she will come to know Yahweh."

Hosea 2:16; 21-22.

Again we come together in our bond of faith, hope and love to celebrate another sister's entrance into her new life with Christ, and to thank God for the beautiful mystery of Sister Madeleine Sophie's vocation; in her call and response in faith to be the fourth member of a Congregation, then struggling in its infancy of development.

Throughout her retirement years in Holy Family infirmary, Sister was never really a bed patient as such, but it seems to be a real tribute to the staff of Nursing Services that, as of last fall, Sister became activated to the point where she could assist at the Eucharistic Sacrifice (upstairs) and eat her dinner in the wheelchair. Besides the loving attention of all the staff, Sister Evelyn and Sister Mary Joan worked in a special way to get her moving about. Sister Evelyn took her to the group exercises and Sister Mary Joan worked with her daily in therapy. I never thought I would see the time when Sister Madeleine Sophie would return to her room from therapy walking and pushing her wheelchair. With help, she did this all winter, spring and right up to the time when debilitation became apparent.

Sister's death was attributed to cerebral vascular disease and the infirmities of age. Two weeks or so prior to her death, she showed signs of debilitation, becoming extremely dehydrated and malnourished because of her inability to take water or nourishment; she slept most of the time, however, the Nursing Staff did get her up daily.

When Mrs. Leffers thought the end was approaching, Father Tom Kessler, OFM, Cap., was called. He administered the Sacrament of the Sick again and stayed with Sister praying all the while until she died at 2:35 p.m., May 25. It seems significant that she died on the feast of St. Madeleine Sophie and also on the day set aside by the Congregation as the day of prayer for vocations.

Sister Madeleine Sophie was born October 27, 1886, in Pierceton, Indiana, the second oldest of ten children. (One brother died in infancy) Apparently, sometime in December of that year, Mrs. Renier made a trip to Chicago, her home city, taking little Sophie with her. According to her sister, Frances Fitzgerald, this explains the fact of her baptism in St. Joseph's Church in Chicago. After living in Pierceton for several years, the Renier family moved to Avilla, Indiana, not far from Kendallville. It was in Avilla that Sister injured her knee. Because she never received proper medical attention at the time, later surgeries could not correct the condition and her knee remained stiff until the end of her life. In 1908, the family moved to Chicago.

It seems that God's apparent instrument in stimulating Madeleine Sophie's interest in missionary life was the Society of Missionary Helpers, a society which Father Sigstein had started to aid the poor missions. While recuperating from a second knee surgery in November of 1917, she came to know of this society through a friend who very readily supplied her with enough linen to make an altar cloth. Her missionary work had begun!

In her memoirs, Sister speaks of Father Sigstein's visit to the Renier home in May of 1918. After that meeting she and her Mother attended monthly meetings of the Missionary Helpers. It was at one of these meetings that she met Sister Julia Doyle. In time, Sister Madeleine Sophie came to receive spiritual direction from Father Sigstein

and on March 25, 1921, made her Act of Consecration to Mary according to the True Devotion. Her spiritual direction resolved into a daily schedule of prayer and work to be followed at home. On December 27, 1922, Father called her to St. Bernard's hospital and asked her to make a novena and return to him after completing it. Sister did and so it was that Father Sigstein accepted her into his little community. She entered the Academy of Our Lady on January 18, 1923. Sister Marie Bodin was already there, the only other member at the Academy, as Sister Julia Doyle and Sister Marie Benes had already gone to New Mexico in August of 1922.

Sister's sojourn at the Academy lasted from January 18, to September 2, 1923, when she was missioned to Ócate, New Mexico in October of 1923. Ócate was the Congregation's second mission center. It was at Ócate on the feast of St. Alphonsus, August 2, 1924, that Sister made first profession of vows. Throughout the following years, her missionary activities took her to Redlands and Monterey in California; Ócate, Las Vegas and Cerrillos in New Mexico; Gary and Victory Noll in Indiana.

Sister returned to Victory Noll in August of 1944 to join Sister Catherine Ann Larsen in the sewing room as a community seamstress. She retained her position as seamstress until her retirement.

Sister is survived by three sisters and one brother: Mrs. Barbara Fahlen and Mrs. Gene Erben of Hollywood, California; Mrs. Frances Fitzgerald and Urban Renier of Chicago, and several nieces and nephews.

Frances Fitzgerald drove with Mr. and Mrs. Urban Renier and their son Edward, while Mrs. Margie Lasecki, a niece, came by bus from Detroit. Margie is the daughter of Sister's deceased brother, Joe. None of the other members of Sister's family were able to attend the funeral.

The Liturgy of Christian Burial was celebrated at 8:00 a.m., Friday morning by Father Reginald Lawrence, OFM, Cap., assisted by Brother Terry Knaffla, OFM, Cap., and the novices.

The readings seemed to speak of Madeleine Sophie's faith response to God's call to a celibate life in a real missionary wilderness at that time. Throughout her life, God gifted her with integrity, justice, tenderness and love. Because of her faithfulness, she came to that wisdom whereby her consecrated life became an act of praise and a return of love for love.

Always with gratitude for what Sister Madeleine Sophie has been, for what she has done and will continue to do for the Congregation --

Lovingly in Jesus and Mary,

*Sister Germaine Stadler*