



## **SISTER GABRIELLE SKUPIEN, OLVM**

Sister Gabrielle peacefully went home God about 9:10 p.m. on the Feast of Pentecost. I was with her for about 30 minutes and prayed with her using brief scripture quotes, one being from the Song of Songs, Come my beloved, come to me... Then remembering Sister Gabrielle was Polish and held her Polish heritage dear, I used my phone to translate “Go to God” into Polish and said it to her several times. She was very peaceful so I decided to leave knowing the nurses were going to be with her. I blessed her again using the phrase in Polish, kissed her forehead and left. I had just gotten back to my room and a short time later I was called, letting me know she had gone to God.

Sister Gabrielle was born in Chicago, Illinois, on January 10, 1915, the fifth of seven children born to Stephen and Catherine (Kurek) Skupien. She was baptized Gabrielle Cecilia on January 17, 1915, at St. Barbara Catholic Church in Chicago, Illinois.

Her parents and three brothers, Frank, Father Edward, and Doctor Norbert Skupien, and two sisters, Charlotte Lewandowski, and Marie Zubek, preceded her in death. One sister, Rita Lally, residing in Naperville, Illinois, survives Sister Gabrielle.

Before entering the Congregation, Sister Gabrielle work as a seamstress and doing dress alterations. Sewing would remain a part of her throughout her life. Just past her 20th birthday, on February 4, 1935, she entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters. Three years later on March 25, 1938, she made first vows. In September of that year she was sent to Grants, New Mexico, as her first mission and then to Ely, Nevada, two years later. She told the story of her time in Ely about sliding off the road outside of Eureka, Nevada, where she and Sister Dorothy Schneider went every Tuesday to teach the children of ranchers and miners. Eureka had been a prosperous silver mining town, but by this time in the early 1940's it was more of a ghost town. The only decent-looking establishment was the Gold Bar where Sister Gabrielle went in and asked the proprietress for a container of coffee since their thermos had broken when the car slid into the snow bank. The bar became very quiet, and one by one, the men began removing their hats to show respect. One man sitting alone came up to Sister saying, “I want to thank you for being kind to me some years ago at the Catholic Sisters Hospital in Indianapolis.” She thanked him graciously after he gave her two dollars, even though she had never been in Indianapolis. He smiled, really smiled, as though he finally paid off a debt he owed. The proprietress gave the Sisters coffee, refusing any payment. Sister Gabrielle sent the two dollars to the sisters in Indianapolis, which they greatly appreciated, accomplishing the deed the man in the bar had begun. Sister Gabrielle also said later in life that she felt enriched by the knowledge that acts of kindness come from the strangest of places.

Sister Gabrielle went on to serve in the missions in California, Alabama, Michigan, Ohio, Missouri, Colorado, and Florida. She spent the majority of her missionary life in Florida, serving in several places in both the Archdiocese of Miami and the Diocese

of St. Petersburg. She first went to North Miami in 1971, and left from Coral Springs when she retired to Victory Noll in 2006. She served as Director of Religious Education, pastoral ministry and with social services for seniors. She also helped with liturgies and music.

Education and learning were important to Sister Gabrielle. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Regis College in Denver, Colorado, in May of 1969, and a Masters of Theology degree from Saint Xavier College in Chicago, Illinois, in August of 1974. She spent the summer of 1975 in Lublin, Poland where she studied Polish culture, history and language and completed 130 hours of studies at the University Marie Curie Sklodowski, receiving her diploma in August.

Sister Gabrielle was always a lady and knew how to dress appropriately for any occasion, especially helpful after the congregation no longer required the habit. She would have her purse and shoes matching her dress, which most of the time she had designed and sewed herself. There were several stories about her fondness for dressing correctly and making sure those with her were also in the correct attire. She often wore a hat to complete the outfit. In her entrance photo, her hat goes perfectly with her dress. In her last few months, she didn't remember who I was, but on one occasion she let me know she liked my shoes. It made me smile because it was such a wonderful part of Sister Gabrielle.

No family was able to join the Victory Noll Community for her wake on Wednesday night, June 11, or her funeral on Thursday morning, June 12, 2014. Father Dale Bauman celebrated the Eucharist and in his homily, he reminded us that Sister Gabrielle took Jesus' command of "Be not afraid" to heart. It was thread woven throughout her liturgy, which she planned, beginning with the opening song and carried out in the readings. He also reminded us that we, too, should be not afraid and remember that the Angel, Gabrielle, always announced good news and by her life, so did Sister Gabrielle.

Sister Gabrielle was a "spirited Chicagoan" as one newspaper article described her. Quoting from the reading at her funeral, she was "a spark among the stubble." (Wisdom 3:7) She was a zealous missionary and faithful child of God. May she now enjoy all the fruits of her labor and the peace of eternal life.

With peace and gratitude,



Sister Ginger Downey, O.L.V.M.

