



SISTER MARTHA SIJOTA, OLVM, 90, died June 14, 2020, at Saint Anne Community at Victory Noll, Huntington, Indiana.

Sister Martha was born in Kernville, Oregon on August 29, 1929 to John and Olga (Wzientek) Sijota. She was the oldest of seven children, with three brothers and three sisters. Her parents and two brothers, Francis and Paul Sijota, precede her in death. Surviving are her three sisters, Rosemary

Brown of Sweet Home, Oregon, Barbara Sijota of Salem, Oregon, Susan Barker of Lynnwood, Washington, and one brother, Howard Sijota of Newberg, Oregon.

She was baptized Martha Bernice on October 13, 1929, at St. Augustine Catholic Church in Oceanlake, Oregon. She graduated from Saint Mary's Academy in Portland Oregon, in 1947, and moved to Chicago, Illinois, in 1948. She did general office work and became a secretary for General American Transportation Corporation. One of her letters of recommendation to OLVM was from her boss at GATC. He said the letter for Martha was the hardest, yet the most happy and gratifying one he had ever written. He said, "She has been a tireless and faithful employee —diligent in all her efforts — but, equally important, she has endeared herself to all of us by her sunny and cheerful disposition — friendly and helpful ...". Continuing, he said even though they hated to lose her, after they realized her seriousness, they all agreed, "Wonderful." The letter worked, and Martha entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on September 6, 1956. Given the name Sister Dominic at the entrance to the novitiate, she made first vows on August 5, 1959, with final profession in 1965. After the Second Vatican Council, she returned to her baptismal name, Martha Bernice, in 1969.

Sister Martha has the shortest list of states that she served in of any of the Sisters for whom I have had the privilege to write memorial letters. She served only in three states — California, Wyoming and Indiana. Her first 18 years were in various parishes in California, followed by two years in Cheyenne, Wyoming, at St. Joseph's Parish. She returned to California for another 10 years. All of her parish and diocesan ministry was in Religious Education and she taught at all levels from elementary to adults. She worked three years in the Religious Education Department for the Diocese of Monterey, California. Sister Martha received a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology with a minor in Psychology from Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles, California, and a Master in Religious Education from University of Seattle.

Sister Martha returned to Victory Noll in 1992 because of health issues. She was able to put her secretarial skills to work by serving as an assistant to the Holy Family Healthcare Coordinator and the nursing department. She helped with the medical records, taking Sisters to doctor appointments and accompanying them to the emergency room or for surgery. Sr. Martha also helped to do the teleconferencing for

the Sisters. Those were the days when we would use a closed-circuit connection for the presentations so Sisters who were not able to be in workshops, regional gatherings or other community meetings could participate as much as they were able. Sister Martha continued to learn and use technology until the last few days before her death when she sent one of her last emails to her family.

Sister Martha retired in 2009, to a ministry of prayer and presence at Victory Noll. I think we all know that in many ways Martha was our residential “hermit.” She first lived on Holy Family first floor and later on Saint Joseph’s first floor. She got up early every morning, worked on a puzzle in the puzzle room in Holy Family and then would retire early in the evening. She was always a calming and prayerful presence.

Sister Martha was always a curious learner. For at least the last eight years, she would send her questions to the Leadership Team via email. She had a searching mind and always asked probing questions. She continued to read a wide variety of books on subjects like quantum science, quantum theology and the universe story. But she was also up for a good murder mystery thrown into the books sitting by her chair. She never lost her sweet smile or the spirited twinkle in her beautiful blue eyes. Recalling the words of her boss from 64 years ago, she never lost her sunny disposition and friendly smile.

The unusual situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to change our usual rituals of a vigil and a Eucharistic liturgy. We honored and celebrated Sister Martha on Monday, June 22, 2020, but without the gathering of all the community, family and friends. In this different atmosphere, we brought her earthly remains to the Our Lady of Victory Chapel where she had professed her first vows and started her journey as a Victory Noll Sister nearly 61 years ago. On this day, we sent her not to a parish to teach religious education rather we bid her farewell and sent her on final journey to her eternal home and the loving embrace of God.

We are grateful, Sr. Martha, for your faithful service in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus through your work in religious education and your faithful service to your Sisters through the many trips to airports, hospitals and medical appointments. Whether planned or not, you were there to be the driver and to add a comforting word or respect the needed silence.

With blessings and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sr. Ginger Downey OLVM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr. Ginger Downey, OLVM