

August 28, 2010

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family, and Friends

Sister Barbara Marie died peacefully at 10:40 P.M. on Wednesday, August 4, 2010. Sister Ann Shirley was with Barbara Marie when she died, and Sister Lupita had just walked into the room. They prayed at her bedside, and waited there until the undertaker arrived.

Sister Barbara Marie had been failing during the week prior to her death, and it was expected that God was going to call her home soon. However right up until the day of her death, she was conscious and cheerful. In the morning when Sister Betty visited her and asked how she was doing, she responded with a big smile, "I am fine, and how are you?"

Sister Barbara Marie was born in Belleville, Illinois, on December 3, 1924, to John and Eleonora Fohl Witt. Four brothers, Joseph, Paul, Bernard and Cyril Witt and two sisters, Eleonora Draper and Marie Degenhardt preceded her in death.



Sister Barbara Marie entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on October 27, 1945. She made First Profession of Vows on August 5, 1948, and Perpetual Vows on August 5, 1954 at Victory Noll. Barbara Marie served in the missions of Indiana, Michigan, California and Texas. Many of her mission years were spent at Victory Noll serving sisters and guests through her skill in culinary arts. She was an excellent cook and baker, and served with much joy and generosity. Janet Young, a friend of Sister Barbara Marie, shared that Barbara Marie told her that when she felt called to Religious life she was hesitant to tell her parents because they had previously discouraged her sister Eleonora from entering. However, she was pleasantly surprised that they were very accepting of her call and decision to enter. Barbara Marie made one request of the Community before entering. She told the Superior that she wanted to be a baker and serve God and the Community in this way. Her father was a baker and Barbara Marie had the desire to follow in his footsteps. Sister Barbara Marie took the opportunity to enhance her gifts in this field by attending workshops to learn new skills in cooking, baking and serving with attractive presentation. Postulants and Novices were taught cooking and baking under the skillful and loving direction of Barbara Marie. Many knew nothing in this field and they received encouragement, patience, and affirmation from Barbara Marie. She would allow them to try making one of the main dishes or baking bread. Barbara Marie always made them feel that they had done a superb job and complimented them on the finished product. She was always saving some sweets and goodies for them when they arrived to help in the kitchen.

Janet Young also shared how grateful she and her family were and blessed to have Barbara Marie for a friend. She shared family life with them at times and was always joyful, encouraging and loving. It was through Father Pat McNulty that Janet met Sister Barbara Marie. In 1977, Sister Barbara Marie had the opportunity to make a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was on that Pilgrimage that she met Father Pat and they became good friends. Janet was a friend of Father Pat and he brought her to meet Sister Barbara Marie. Janet has a grandson Chase Olinger who is studying to be a Maryknoll Priest. He has come to Victory Noll to talk with the sisters. Barbara Marie knew him as a little boy, played with him, and encouraged him.

Kevin Luechtefeld, nephew of Sister Florence Luechtefeld, would bring Barbara Marie's sister Eleonora to Victory Noll to visit Barbara Marie. The order of the day was to play many hands of 500 or Rummy, enjoy some snacks and a glass of beer. They could be heard laughing and teasing one another and spreading joy all around. This was also true later when Barbara Marie would visit Eleonora in Belleville, Ill., when she could no longer come to Victory Noll.

Besides her skill at baking, Sister Barbara Marie was also very artistic. She would generously offer to help decorate on special feast days and Christmas. She also baked beautifully decorated cookies and pastries for these holidays. She was never known to complain when asked to help, her response was always yes.

In 1993, Sister Barbara Marie retired at Victory Noll but continued to do volunteer work such as assisting sisters with sewing. In 2002, she became a resident on 3rd floor of Holy Family Health Care Center.

At the Vigil on Friday evening, Barbara Marie's nephew Joe Degenhardt and his wife Mary Ann from Oakdale, Ill., were present. Sisters shared their memories of Sister Barbara Marie. Everyone who spoke described her as a person who exuded joy and happiness, and had a very generous spirit. Sr. Lucille said, "the size of the slice of pie or cake that she would give us were symbols of her generous, loving heart." Sister Irene shared that when she came to Victory Noll and visited the sisters on 3rd floor of Holy Family, Barbara Marie asked her, "what can I do for you?" Irene responded, "maybe you would do a little sewing for me". From then on Barbara Marie helped Irene with some mending and small sewing tasks. At this time Barbara Marie began to call Irene "my friend" and continued to do so whenever she saw her. Sister Betty shared that as a Novice she knew that Sister Barbara Marie's prize was her delicious bread making. Betty had never made bread and was apprehensive when Barbara Marie told her she was going to teach her to bake not only white bread but also delicious whole wheat bread. Sister Betty followed her directions and baked the whole wheat bread. When finished, true to character Barbara Marie told her how wonderful and delicious it turned out. After the Vigil we went to the dining room where we enjoyed refreshments, and continued sharing our memories of Sister Barbara Marie.

On Saturday, August 7, 2010 we celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial. Sister Barbara Marie's nephew Joe Degenhardt and his wife Mary Ann were present. After the sprinkling with Holy Water, Joe and Mary Ann placed the Pall and the Crucifix on the casket. The first reading was chosen from St. Paul's letter to the Romans Chapter 8:14-23. In this reading Barbara Marie saw God as her Abba who would deliver her from all fear, and call her His child. Hope in a loving God was the guiding force of her life. The appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus was chosen for the Gospel. Here Jesus walks with the two disciples having intimate conversation with them and answering their questions. They recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Father Fahey spoke of Barbara Marie as a baker of bread. He said bakers are special and important people. The bread they bake makes people happy and contented. One day Jesus would say, "I am the Bread of Life," and would give us this Bread of Life in the Eucharist. Like the disciples, Sister Barbara Marie recognized Jesus in the Bread of the Eucharist.

After Mass, we processed to the cemetery, where we laid Sister Barbara Marie to rest with the final prayers, blessing of the casket, and the singing of the hymn to Our Lady of Victory, "We have a Holy Mother." A delicious dinner to celebrate Sister Barbara Marie's life followed.

We thank you Barbara Marie for your generous loving service as a Victory Noll Missionary Sister these many years. We rejoice that you are now with Jesus your Bread of Life.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sister Betty Anderson, O.L.V.M." The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name of the signatory.

Sister Elizabeth Anderson, OLVM
General Secretary