

Victory Noll
Huntington, Indiana
December 15, 1984

Dear Sisters,

"When the evening of life comes, you will be judged on love."
St. John of the Cross

The crowning of her faithful discipleship came at 4:15 p.m. on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12, 1984 when Sister Mary Bernard Gerhart celebrated love made perfect in her entrance into eternal life.

While Sister was in Santa Fe, she fell and broke a bone in her right leg. The following year on May 17, 1979, she returned to Victory Noll to take up residence in Holy Family Health Care Center. In June of 1979, she fell and fractured her right hip which necessitated surgery. In June of 1980, she fell again and broke a bone in her left arm. After all these breaks, she was moved from second to third floor and with the help of a walker, she was able to get around nicely. She enjoyed being with the Sisters and participated in the events around the Noll whenever possible. She loved to play cards in the evenings and enjoyed the outdoors in the wheelchair or in the car. One of the last evenings before she was taken to the hospital, she even tried her hand at the game, "Trivial Pursuits".

On Friday evening, November 30, just before Evening Praise, she seemed to have an apparent heart attack. She was taken to St. Joseph's hospital in Fort Wayne where her condition was diagnosed as a heart block. As soon as her condition was stabilized, a permanent pacemaker was put in. She tolerated the procedure well and the doctor felt that in a few days she would be able to return home. Shortly after, she began to feel weak and had no appetite. The doctor felt she had had a stroke and a brain scan confirmed this. He said it was mild and felt that with medication and physical therapy she could recover as her heart was doing fine. But Sister Mary Bernard seemed ready to die. She talked about it on Tuesday, December 11 and said she would not be returning to Victory Noll. That evening, her condition became critical. Sisters Marie Welter and Camilla were with her that evening. She seemed to be in and out of consciousness but reminded them several times that she wanted to be awakened in time for Mass and Holy Communion. She was alert enough to tell Sister Camilla that her hands were rough. On Wednesday morning, Sister Eleanor was able to go to the hospital and be with her for almost two hours. When Sister Eleanor called her by name and started to pray, Sister Mary Bernard responded by opening her eyes but she could not make any motion or speak. Several of the Sisters visited her on the feast day. Sister Marjorie was with her when she died very peacefully at 4:15 p.m.

Sister Mary Bernard spent almost 36 years of her religious life as homemaker and head cook in our missions. Ten years and seven months of that time were spent as cook in Bishop Noll's residence in Fort Wayne. Recently, when I visited with Sister Catherine, she told me that Bishop Noll described Sister Mary Bernard as having a most wonderful disposition, that she was so kindly and so forgiving. What a beautiful compliment! Truly, the love of Jesus and Mary was the basis of her ministry to others. The long hours, the hard work and all the detail were a part of her loving ministry to her community. Those who worked in the kitchen as novices under Sister Mary Bernard will remember her kindness and patience with their lack of culinary skills.

Sister Mary Bernard was born June 1, 1903 in St. Louis, MO., the third oldest in a family of five children. Her mother died at the age of 27 and some of the children were reared with an Aunt and Uncle and the others lived with their Grandparents. Sister entered the Community from Corpus Christi Parish in St. Louis on February 4, 1935 and made first profession of vows March 25, 1938 at Victory Noll. She was looking forward to celebrating her golden jubilee in February and also next August.

Sister is survived by Sister Eleanor of Victory Noll. One sister and two brothers preceded her in death. Two nieces, Mrs. Mary Serra of St. Louis and Miss Dorothy Gerhart of Florissant were unable to be present because of illness. Both had intended to drive.

The Liturgy of Christian Burial was concelebrated by Father Don Body, OFM Capuchin and Father Don Meyer, a LaSalette priest from the St. Louis Province. Father Don Brody gave the homily and used the words of Wisdom 3:1-9 which were written for the Jews as a source of comfort regarding their beliefs about suffering and death. These were the Jews of the Diaspora, living among the pagans and agnostics. All of us have been enriched and inspired by the way our sisters and brothers have accepted suffering -- it lifts us up and fills us with trust and hope. We have been touched and graced by our Sisters as they so peacefully prepare themselves to meet the Lord. We see the working of the Holy Spirit in them and we note their strong faith. We rejoice with Sister Mary Bernard as she experiences the vision of the Lord who was her Way, and Truth and Life.

Sister Mary Louise Rowney led the prayers of commendation at the end of the liturgy. She prefaced the prayers with Bishop Noll's thoughts about Sister Mary Bernard and exhorted us to be as forgiving.

It was damp but not cold as we walked to the cemetery. Sister Eleanor was able to be present (via wheelchair and car) for the graveside prayers for which we were all grateful. May the love of Jesus and Mary comfort Sister Eleanor and may the memory of Sister Mary Bernard's goodness be a source of joy and strength to her.

At the offering of the gifts, we sang the song, "Like a Sunflower". It seemed to speak of Sister Mary Bernard.

Like a sunflower that follows every movement of the sun,
so I turn toward you to follow you, my God.

In simplicity, charity, I follow.
In simplicity, honesty, I follow.
In simplicity, fidelity, I follow.

Always with love in Jesus and Mary,

Sister Germaine Stadler