



SISTER FRANCENE MERKOSKY, OLVM

Sister Francene died peacefully on December 19, 2013 at 4:25 a.m. She was born in Cavell, Saskatchewan, Canada on September 2, 1916 to Vincent Merkosky and Anna Bittner Merkosky. She was baptized Julia Katharina on September 3, 1916 at St. Paschal in Leipzig, Saskatchewan. Her parents were both born in Southern Russia and moved to Canada before their marriage in 1913.

Sister Francene was preceded in death by both her parents and her step-mother, Hedwig Huber Merkosky, one brother, Lawrence Merkosky and two sisters, Marie Loerzel and Antonia Trodd. She has two surviving brothers Leonard and Allan Merkosky and four sisters, Sr. Zita Merkosky, SSND, Hedwig Wurzer, Gloria Maguire and Diane Loewan, all of Canada.

Sister Francene entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on October 27, 1945 and made first vows on August 5, 1948. Her first mission was Elko, Nevada, and then Ely, Nevada. In 1951, she was moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, and she became a naturalized United States citizen in 1952. She served in the missions in Colorado, California, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Michigan, Missouri, Kentucky and Florida.

In a conversation with Sister Francene in 2010, she said that she worked outside with her father and her sister worked inside with her mother. “My father liked to read, so I liked to read. I think I picked it up from him. I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life. One day I read in the Sunday Visitor about a community of Sisters who went out to people who needed help. This is what I wanted to do. I wanted to go out and find those who didn’t have a church and help them. That is how I ended up at Victory Noll. I can still remember the day I crossed the border. It was so easy.” Sister Francene continued to go out to those who needed help whether they had a “church” or not.

Sister Francene spent more than 30 years in the Archdiocese of Miami assisting the elderly in all areas of life in order that they could live with dignity, respect and faith in God. She started this ministry without a lot of support or understanding from the Diocese because they were not really sure what it was or if it was necessary. Sister Francene was ahead of the curve and realized the need to minister to the “Baby Boomers” and made a huge impact on the ministry to the aging and elderly.

To meet the needs of her ministry to the elderly, Sister Francene studied gerontology and spent sabbatical time at The Third Age Center at Fordham University in New York City, working to develop a better understanding between theology and pastoral ministry to the elderly. She was always attending continuing education workshops to help her in her ministry, everything from managing volunteers to analyzing programs to

understanding anger in the elderly. She was very focused on helping the elderly to live joy-filled lives in their waning years.

Sister shared these thoughts of missionary ministry: “In God’s providence, it seems I have become that heart that shares the joys and sorrows of those who suffer the losses brought by age and death. Age, it is said, is a ‘matter of the mind, if one doesn’t mind, it doesn’t matter.’ I shall have made a great contribution if I can help others to see age in this way. But, I shall make an even greater contribution if I can help the elderly look forward with hope and joy to meeting their Creator. For this I pray and ask you to join me, remembering that when working for God, ‘the retirement benefits are out of this world.’ ”

Although Sister Francene loved her ministry in Opa Locka, Florida, she retired in 2001 and returned to Victory Noll to volunteer and use her pastoral care of the elderly training in her ministry with the sisters living on Holy Family 3rd floor.

The Victory Noll sisters and friends gathered on Sunday evening December 22, 2013 for the wake service and then continued sharing stories of Sister Francene, speaking about her compassion, generosity and her personal way of making people feel comfortable and welcome. She was able to be with the poor in such a way that they felt accepted and appreciated.

Father Dale Bauman celebrated the funeral liturgy on Monday December 23, 2013 and in his homily he spoke about how Sister Francene’s name could have very easily come from St. Francis of Assisi who was the first to have a nativity scene. He went on to say that Francene does not have to rely on paper-mache figurines, but she will meet Mary and Joseph and will bow down before Jesus. She will stand with the shepherds and the kings and sing with the angels.

Sister Francene, you followed your call and went out to those who had no “church” whether they were children or adults, young or old or those somewhere in between. May you now enjoy the fruits of your labor and celebrate the joys of eternal life, where all are welcome and find a place called home.

In the peace and love of the Holy Family,



Sr. Ginger Downey, OLVM



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