



SISTER MARY PAULA FORTIER, OLVM

Sister Mary Paula died peacefully on Ash Wednesday morning, March 5, 2014. Sister Mary Jo Maes was on third floor of Holy Family and one of the nurses said she thought that Sister Mary Paula was ready to slip into God's loving embrace, so Sister Mary Jo went in and prayed at Sister Mary Paula's bed side as she took her last earthly breath and released her soul. It was very peaceful and gentle entrance into eternal life.

Sister Mary Paula was born in New Castle, Indiana, on July 17, 1919, the youngest of three children of John Zemus Fortier and Sophie (Doucet) Fortier. She was baptized on August 9, 1919, at St. Anne's Catholic Church in New Castle. She was preceded in death by her parents and both of her siblings, Charles Fortier and Geraldine Burnham.

Sister Mary Paula had many names at different times in her life, starting with the names on her birth certificate, Alsace Lorraine Eileen, and her baptismal certificate, baptized Eileen Alsace Lorraine, her entrance application is signed as Lorraine Fortier, yet on other official congregational documents she is listed as Eileen Fortier. Her family referred to her as Lorraine. No matter the order of her names, she was Sister Mary Paula for the last 68 years, having entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on October 27, 1945 and making first vows on August 5, 1948. She left soon after for her first mission in Salt Lake City, Utah. After a year in Salt Lake City, she served in Nevada, California, Michigan, Arizona, Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. She worked in catechetics, social services and pastoral ministry throughout her missionary life.

In 1963, Sister Mary Paula was missioned at St. Elizabeth of Hungary Clinic in Tucson, Arizona, and it was there that her interest in social work became clear. She studied social work at St. Francis College in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and received her degree in 1969. She was certified by the State of Michigan as a social worker in 1976. Sister Mary Paula served in Detroit, Michigan, where she worked for the Archdiocesan Asian Refugee Resettlement Program. In 1979, she was once again at St. Elizabeth of Hungary Clinic where she ministered before returning to Victory Noll in 1984.

Once she arrived back at Victory Noll she started to volunteer at Birthline, a place where women with unplanned pregnancies could go for support, discernment and care. It was during this time that she became aware of the national organization

Love INC (Love In the Name of Christ). She worked ecumenically with other local church leaders to bring Love INC to Huntington, Indiana. In 1985 she helped to staff the office for Love INC. As Love INC started growing and getting more staff, Sister Mary Paula moved into another area of need and became involved with Huntington County Habitat for Humanity. Like Love INC, Habitat is a national and international organization that works for the betterment of people by building low-cost homes for families who otherwise would not have a chance to own a home. Sister worked in a volunteer capacity, but her contribution was much more than that of a volunteer. She gave her guidance, prayerful and moral support as the new organization took flight. Habitat, like Love INC, continues serve the needs of Huntington and Huntington County. Those who worked with her described her as dynamic, purposeful, extraordinary, friendly, soft-spoken and modest.

Sister Mary Paula spent two years caring for her sister, Geraldine, before returning to Victory Noll in 1997 where she helped out in the mail room, print shop and membership office. She had great organizational skills that were always needed at Victory Noll, and her quiet, behind-the-scenes personality kept things going smoothly.

Sister Mary Paula's sister-in-law, Madelene Fortier, and two nephews Philip and Matthew Fortier, along with Matthew's wife, Jean, and three children, Michael, Therese and Mary Madalene, were able to join the community for Sister Mary Paula's vigil on Sunday March 9, 2014 and also for the funeral liturgy on Monday March 10, 2014.

There are two "tag" lines that I found in the file that speak of who Sister Mary Paula was in her life as a Victory Noll sister. One is for Love INC; "Leave His imprint on Someone's life," and one she submitted for Victory Noll in 1997; "A daring response to a challenging world." Her life was a daring response to a challenging and changing world and she left His imprint on many people's lives. May she now enjoy the rewards of daring to respond with her whole life and live for all eternity in the presence of God.

With prayer and gratitude,



Sister Ginger Downey, OLVM

