



April 11, 2006

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family and Friends,

SISTER LOUISE MARIE BERARD was suffering from congestive heart failure. As she became weaker, she was bedridden for a while but would rebound, walking along the hall the next day with her walker. In spite of her pain, she was always gracious and pleasant, with a beautiful smile for everyone. When her death was imminent, her sister Alma and her niece came to visit and stayed by her bedside, along with several of our sisters. Sister Louise Marie died peacefully on March 30 at 10 AM. She was 94 years old.

Louise was born on September 8, 1911 in Joliet, IL to Daniel Berard and Alphonsine Bouchard Berard. She was baptized Louise Celina Alphonsine, named for her godmother and mother. Louise was the seventh child, with six older brothers, Daniel, Paul, Albert, Ralph, Robert and Lawrence, followed by her sister Alma and her brother Anthony. When Louise was growing up, many of her older brothers had already left home to work or get married.

In May, 1931 when she was 20 years old, Louise applied to enter the Society of Missionary Catechists of Our Blessed Lady of Victory, as we were then known. The application form asked her to enclose her latest photograph and in parenthesis, ("A snapshot will do."). Being a missionary community, we certainly were practical! Her photograph showed a lovely young woman with wavy, blond hair, smiling at the camera with a sparkle in her eyes.

Her pastor, Fr. Kennedy, wrote to Fr. Sigstein, our founder, and gave her a warm recommendation: *"She is a splendid Catholic girl in every respect and I believe will be a joy to you and a credit to us and to her good parents, if you see fit to accept her for what she hopes to make her life work."*

Louise entered our congregation on September 20, 1932. She spent three years at Victory Noll in preparation for her missionary work. She took courses ranging from Theology to English Composition, Music to Spanish, Social Problems to Methods of Teaching. Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick, given by the Red Cross, was part of her preparation. Every novice also took turns helping with housekeeping, in the kitchen and in the laundry, to keep Victory Noll running. Those were busy three years.

Her religious life was guided by Fr. Sigstein, who was the director of the congregation in 1932. He used to give talks to the sisters and was their spiritual guide. Louise Marie was influenced by our founder's love of Mary and love for the poor, a spirit that she carried with her throughout her life.

Louise Marie's father became critically ill in May, 1935. She went home and was there for his death and funeral in early June. It was a difficult time for her. The following September, Louise Marie made her first vows.

In March, 1936, she was sent to her first mission, Redlands, CA. Our sisters had opened Redlands in 1932 but did not move into the Burrage Mansion until the following year. In 1937, Louise Marie went to Gary, IN, then back to California: Coachella, Los Banos, Azusa, San Pedro and San Diego. She was appointed superior of the house in the various missions where she worked. One of our sisters remembers her as the best superior she ever had.

When they lived in San Diego, the story goes that Louise Marie invited everyone to go to El Centro to visit our sisters. It was a trip over the mountains and through the desert, before the time of interstate highways. On the return trip, they ran out of gas! Louise Marie had forgotten to check the gauge. They were stranded among the cacti, with no vehicles in sight for miles. After a long time, a little old man in a beat-up truck approached. They gave him some money to buy gas for them. It was another long wait, wondering if he had just taken the money, never to return. He finally did come and they made it safely home.

There was a change of pace for Louise Marie in 1963 when she was asked to work in Elko, NV. She stayed there for six years. In 1969 she left the West and went to Appalachia, where she began work in Beattyville, KY. Getting to that mission required driving through "hollers" and over hills and eventually ending up in an isolated mountain town. Louise Marie energetically devoted herself to religious education, visiting the homes and helping the poor. She lived in a poor, little house herself. She loved the people and they loved her.

Our mission in Beattyville closed in 1975. Bishop Ackerman of Covington, who knew our sisters when he was in San Diego, lamented their leaving. He wrote to Sr. Louise Marie, *"It has been my good fortune to know the sisters.... I was privileged to witness the apostolic work of the sisters in the apostolate for the Spanish and that of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.... On my arrival in Covington, I was informed of the presence of 'Victory Noll' in the Diocese. This information delighted me and strengthened me. ... [The Sisters'] involvement beyond human estimation places the Diocese of Covington in the debt of this religious family who came to its aid from the Hoosier country."*

After a sabbatical, a new phase of Louise Marie's life began when she went to Tucson, AZ in 1976. She was 65 years old. From then until the year 2000, she worked in Our Lady of Sorrows Parish and in our clinic, doing geriatric work, home visiting and pastoral ministry. She was skilled in sewing, also, and often did favors for the other sisters. She knew the city well and could guide anyone anywhere, especially sisters who had recently arrived. In 2000, when she was 89 years old, she retired to Victory Noll where her long missionary life came to an end.

Louise Marie was laid to rest in our cemetery on April 1st. Before her death, her sister, Alma Fitzpatrick, her niece Margaret with her two children, Peter and Katie visited her. For the funeral, other nieces and nephews also came: Colleen, Cathy, John and Tom. We are grateful to Louise Marie for her many years with us and for her service to God's people. She shared her life with us here on earth. May we share it again with her in the life to come.

Sincerely,

Sr. Melanie Persche

Sister Melanie Persche, OLVM
General Secretary

