

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Mary Elise Calmus

BORN: November 1933

ENTERED CONGREGATION: August 15, 1949

DIED: October 23, 2007

TODAY we gather to celebrate the life of Sister Mary Elise. Each of us is here because she has touched us and she was touched by us. With us today are members of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, including her classmates and cluster members, as well as her nephews and nieces— John, Bob, Ellen, Mary’s husband Mark—and other family members and friends from various states. Welcome to each of you as we remember the gift that Sister Mary Elise, “Aunt Mary,” was for us.

Seventy-four years ago, Mary Louise was born in Aumsville, Oregon, to John and Martha (Metcalf) Calmus in November 1933. She was baptized in St. Boniface Church in Sublimity, Oregon.

Mary Louise was the youngest of the family of six, and the only girl. Her five brothers — John Jr., Don, Father Dick, Jim and Tom — have preceded her to their eternal reward.

Mary Louise helped on the family chicken ranch during her childhood as they moved from Oregon to Beaumont, California, and then to Yuma, Arizona. While in Beaumont she received the sacrament of confirmation from Bishop Charles Buddy in nearby Precious Blood Church, Banning. Mary met the Sisters of the Precious Blood when she went to Little Flower Academy as a boarder, crossing the sand dunes from Yuma to San Luis Rey.

With Sister Damien Stoff as a mentor, she decided to enter the Sisters of the Precious Blood, and did so in 1949, from Immaculate Conception Parish in Yuma. Mary traveled to Dayton for her years of formation and received the name Sister Mary Elise. Even though she was one of the youngest in her class, she was very mature and responsible.

After profession of vows in 1952, Sister Mary Elise began her ministry in education, to which she dedicated most of her life. She taught at Christ the King in Denver and St. Mary’s, Phoenix. Her leadership and organizational skills

were proven when she was chosen to be the founding principal for St. Mark’s in Phoenix and Our Lady of Grace in El Cajon, Calif. During these same years she continued her education, receiving a bachelor’s of science degree in elementary education from St. Joseph’s College, Rensselaer, Ind., graduating magna cum laude. A few years later Mary Elise received a grant and was involved in research projects for the University of Dayton and Dayton Public Schools. She received her master’s of science degree in education from the University of Dayton in 1970.

During the next eight years, Mary Elise was in Colorado, serving in leadership capacities for the Education Department in the Archdiocese of Denver. At the same time she was pursuing her studies and received her doctorate in educational research from the University of Colorado/Boulder in 1978. Some of us remember the research project which included the membership of our congregation.

Besides her involvement in ministry, Elise always wanted to be involved with the congregation, serving on committees, such as those for government, Maria Stein and Salem Heights. Many of us were also beneficiaries of Elise’s skills in cooking, sewing, hair cuts and love of music/singing. Some of us are still waiting for the Saturday taco dinner.

After the death of her mother, Elise had a motherly concern for her brothers. This gift of compassion, of knowing others’ needs and responding to them, was Elise’s trademark. After her priest-brother, Father Dick, needed a caregiver, Elise moved to Tucson to take on that duty. She continued in fulltime ministry as principal of St. Ambrose School and later in administration at the University of Arizona. Here she received commendations for being an outstanding special assistant to three of the senior vice-presidents of the university.

During this time Elise experienced her own pain and suffering with the sudden deaths of her brothers, her struggle with

cancer, broken bones and the sickness of Sister Rosalina Gonzales and Sister JoAnn Thomas.

In 1999 Mary Elise was elected to congregational leadership as general councilor and was appointed treasurer of the congregation. She also was appointed chair of the Maria Anna Brunner Fund. She found the latter very fulfilling because of her desire to work with the underprivileged and to help with projects that gave them a better life.

Until she left Tucson, Elise volunteered as an after-school tutor for Project YES [a program of the Tucson Urban League], studying Spanish in order to help more. The community’s house in Tucson, the Padilla House, was stranger to no one, facilitating a Tucson cluster before these existed in the congregation. Later, Elise was involved in forming the Western Hope cluster.

Two years ago, when she had to leave Tucson, Sister Elise’s ministry continued here at Salem Heights until the end. She belonged to the Gift cluster — and gift she really was.

The love of the Eucharist and of Mary under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, la Morenita, were special traits of Elise’s spirituality during her 58 years in religious life. In her own words, Elise says, “I thank God every day for the call to religious life, especially to be a Sister of the Precious Blood. I am honored to walk in the footsteps of Mother Brunner and of so many sisters who have gone before me. I am compelled to carry on their spirit and tradition of adoration of the Precious Blood in the Eucharist and to bring God’s love to those in need.”

We are honored to walk in your footsteps, Elise. Like you, we will carry on the spirit of Mother Brunner both through Eucharistic prayer and in service to those in need. We are grateful for your life-giving presence among us. Adios, Elise!

—Sister Marita Beumer