

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Vera Heile

(Sister Muriel)

BORN: June 1917

ENTERED CONGREGATION: January 24, 1947

DIED: April 20, 2008

THANK you for joining us in this celebration of Sister Vera's life. We extend special sympathy to her friends Socorro Bernasconi and Margie Garcia, who were able to be with Sister Vera before she died and are present with us representing the people of Guadalupe, Arizona.

In June 1917, a baby girl was born to Christian and Cathryn (Stenger) Heile in Cincinnati, Ohio. Named Vera Cathryn, she would be the only child born to them, which ensured that she would be labeled "spoiled" for most of her life. From the third grade until she graduated from Regina High School, Vera was taught by the Sisters of the Precious Blood. She credits Sisters Pascaline Baltes and Mildred Gutman with special influence in her eventual decision to enter our congregation.

Vera did not enter the community until she was nearly 30 years old. After high school she attended art school for two years and worked for a greeting card company. At the same time she attended night school to learn shorthand and typing. She later obtained a position as secretary-receptionist-assistant to a dermatologist. Coming from a protected family environment, Vera saw her working years as a source of valuable experiences.

Although she looked into other religious congregations, Vera's heart always came back to the Sisters of the Precious Blood. She entered the community on January 24, 1947 — by far the oldest in her class. When she received the name

Sister Muriel, the chaplain, Father Roy Grotenrath, nicknamed her "Mother Muriel."

After a year of study at The Catholic University in Washington, she was assigned to work with Sister Pascaline in Fatima Hall, a position she held for 10 years. As one former aspirant said, "Sister Muriel was for us." She was a ready advocate for any girl who needed special understanding. This compassion would be manifested throughout her religious life.

Upon completing her master's degree in American studies at the University of Notre Dame, Vera taught for eight years in Phoenix high schools — St. Mary's for one year and St. Gerard's for seven. During this time she and Sister Georgiana Pahl began teaching catechism in the small Mexican-Yaqui Indian town of Guadalupe, about 12 miles south of Phoenix. I believe it is only fair to say that Vera left her heart in Guadalupe!

For 16 years she lived and worked among the people of that little town, immersed in the language and culture of the two peoples. She began a program for preschoolers, taught adult education, transported people to nearby cities to help them get government assistance, took part in marches to protest the treatment of farm workers, and supported the townspeople in their struggle to obtain a just water supply.

This quote from the Garcia family says much about the regard the people of Guadalupe had for Sister Vera: "One cannot even put a dent to the sacrifice Sister Vera gave our community, with deep love and caring for so many. Her

stubborn nature and physical size helped to pave her way any time she was in a hurry: Clear out or be run over! She has given much and always asks for very little."

After 21 years of ministry in Arizona, Sister Vera returned to Dayton in 1982. Here she worked in Hispanic ministry and volunteered as librarian at Resurrection School. She found little time for her favorite activities of art, music and reading because of her involvement with projects such as healing racism, opposing the death penalty, writing letters to death-row inmates, and serving on various committees in the Dayton area addressing justice issues. Even in her last years residing in Emma Hall, Vera's involvements continued. She was especially active in "Unity in the Valley," a Miami Valley multiracial and multi-ethnic coalition dedicated to building communities free of racism and bigotry.

In all her efforts she was motivated by her sense of Precious Blood spirituality and the questions: "If not us, who? If not now, when? If not for the kingdom of Jesus, why?"

We remember Vera's bright blue eyes, her gracious smile, hearty laugh and compassionate heart...

Vera, you have made a difference in the lives of all those you have touched. Now, good and faithful servant, enjoy the blessings God has promised to those who serve him and his people with their whole hearts.

—Sister Jeanette Buehler