

## **IN MEMORIAM**



# **Sr. Dorothy Kammerer**

**BORN:** September 1918

**ENTERED CONGREGATION:** August 24, 1940

**DIED:** March 19, 2012

**T**ONIGHT we celebrate the gift of Sister Dorothy Kammerer to her family, the Congregation and the People of God who she served directly and indirectly. With us today are her sisters Sister Elizabeth Kammerer, C.P.S. and Lois (Babe is what Dorothy would say) Wall with her husband Raymond, her sister-in-law Augusta Kammerer, niece Charlotte and husband Jim, and nephew Billy Kammerer. Her brother William is deceased. Her parents were William Kammerer and Anna (Nan) Carr Kammerer. She was their second child. Her mother passed away a month after her birth. Dorothy went to live with an aunt and uncle while her brother William stayed with their father. Her father married Clara Nierman Kammerer when Dorothy was six years old. With this Dorothy came back to the family and the family increased with the births of Elizabeth and Lois. She states that: "My own Mother died of the flu at the time of my birth. The best gift my father ever gave us was re-marrying, thus giving the four of us a wonderful Mother. My brother and I were especially grateful for all that she did for us. ...My Mother's heart was always with the poor...Helping the poor is the best tribute that can be given to her." Dorothy also had a generous heart. Whenever she would go home she would always bring a gift - some candy, a book, something she thought the family would enjoy. This generosity was continued by Elizabeth when Dorothy was away.

Dorothy entered the congregation on August 24, 1940 at age 21. A year later she was given the name Sister Mary Fidelia. She taught Business Education in 4 high schools - Phoenix, Arizona, Norwood, Ohio, Sedalia, Missouri, and

Lafayette, Indiana from 1943 to 1966. She was a member of the American Business Women's Association. With the Chapter of 1966 Sister Dorothy was elected Treasurer of the Congregation where she served until 1976. During this time she "plunged energetically into the worlds of corporate finance and big business, learning how the 'haves' of this world live." Dorothy was actively involved in efforts when the Congregation made the decision to file a suit against Bristol Myers in 1976 for an end to promoting infant formula in Third World countries. She saw the need for retirement funds for our retired Sisters. She went to all the dioceses in which we were serving asking to assist with retirement funding. Archbishop Bernardin supported this effort, knowing that most religious Congregations never earned enough income to build a retirement fund. Bernardin took the idea to the Nation's Bishops who instituted what is presently Retirement Fund for Religious. Many Religious Congregations are thankful for her insight in meeting the needs of the future. Along with this, she put our Congregation on firm financial ground for the future. After 1976 she continued in C.P.S. medical accounts for four more years.

In 1980 Sister Dorothy and Sister Clarita Hudson asked the Congregation to sponsor a Vietnamese family during the "Boat lift." It took several months for the family to arrive at the Cincinnati airport. During this time Dorothy and others searched for housing for a family of 8. The Congregation purchased the house initially until the family could afford complete payment. Dorothy and others arrived at the airport but no sponsored family descended from the plane. After

speaking with the pilot, they were told they may have forgotten about the International Date Line and went home to return the next day. Arriving in Cincinnati, the Vo family was driven very quietly to Dayton - so tired, no English language skills, no American food diet. The family quickly learned. The children did well in school. However, "applying for grants, welfare assistance, and food stamps, and standing in the long lines at sources of contributed aid, Dorothy and friends learned first-hand the harsh reality of being truly poor - 'take a number and wait.'" After many years of friendship Dorothy continues to be an "honored" grandmother to the family.

Of course, this was not enough for Dorothy. She saw in one poor area the local grocer was charging too high of prices for groceries. Receiving funds from the Congregation's Social Justice Committee they purchased furnishings from Sister Mary Kathryn Gurren at St. Gregory Seminary. Driving home with a pickup loaded and wearing a Minnie Pearl type hat, a carload of kids passed them yelling "Grandma, get a horse." Clarita told her to immediately remove the hat!!! In Sept. 1981 she and Clarita found a place to start the Community Help Center, a grocery (with staples) store with prices 5% over wholesale. It was an immediate hit. Many customers could not read so they pasted pictures of the contents on the containers. All went well until Dorothy was held up twice, the second time with a knife in her ribs. They transferred ownership of the store in the summer of 1982.

Watching the news and seeing the amount of violence, Sister Dorothy and Sister Canice Werner decided to do something about it. First they gathered Sisters in the House here to pray

then went to the site of the homicide. Then they expanded the prayer into a homicide vigil inviting various churches to become involved. They and others established the Inter Faith Committee for Non-Violence. The prayer vigils continue today at the site and Sisters here who can no longer travel to the site, pray here in this chapel.

Dorothy and Clarita soon knew there were people in the area who never had a hot meal because they had no stove. In 1983 Dorothy scanned the area for a large room to serve meals. From this she began the "House of Bread" opening Dec. 3, 1983. Several people, in particular Mr. Bettman of Bettman's Pharmacy, and others from the Community Help Center found them and were again part of their lives. Initially they had everything but cooks. Soon a man volunteered as cook from a neighborhood apartment and Sister Dorothy, who is not known for cooking, was also a cook! One guest said "Ma'am, I have been in 37 jails and I have never had a meal served to me like the one I ate today." That was the end of Dorothy's cooking. She heard Sister Callista (known as Sister Cooky) was leaving her position, so Dorothy drove to Lafayette to recruit her, and got her. Dorothy then began circulating among the guests refilling coffee cups. She willingly prayed with them, for them, over them, or about them. The first day there were 19 meals served. Within a year or two during the beginning of the month 200 meals were served per day and by the end of the month about 400 meals per day were served, when many guests were completely out of cash and food stamps. The first restaurant to donate prepared food was Neil's Heritage House. Oh, the cornbread! Many people loved being with her and volunteered in the project. She not only established this place but gave a place that many people could also serve the People of God by volunteering. The House of Bread being well established, she resigned as Director to move on.

Near Christmas of 1987, as Dorothy was watching television, she listened to a young Franciscan Brother speak of the poor in Dayton and the need for mothers with children and older people to find someplace to spend the day away from the elements. Having no project to occupy her time, Dorothy started looking for a place for people to stay during the day then go to St. Vincent Hotel for evening shelter. The

search eventually led to "The Other Place."

Dorothy, along with Karen Shepler, rented the first floor of the Christ Episcopal Church. The "Other Place" was a good name because if a child had to go from school to the shelter, they would not be embarrassed if a friend asked "where are you going?" All they had to say was "to the Other Place." The Congregation generously gave money for operating expenses. They started a job training program using an ice cream cart selling ice cream in the city. However, she felt there was something uncomfortable for her at the "Other Place," therefore resigned.

Not having something to do again was not her style. So she hooked up with Sister Mary Faye Hellman who was working in Guatemala. Dorothy and Mary went from Dayton to Guatemala City by bus!! Mary received a grant from the Maria Anna Brunner fund to purchase sewing machines and taught the indigenous women of the village how to make potholders and towels. Dorothy was to bring these back to the states to sell and the women would be paid. "Women Helping Women" opened. Later, due to a banking error, they found another "Women Helping Women" was an abortion center. They quickly changed their name to "Global Sharing." Dorothy therefore needed to set up a business and sell the items along with things from Appalachia, and other things - CANDY made by the poor of Dayton!! She also found other Third World crafts to purchase and sell for women of the Third World. Having difficulty finding a permanent facility and increase of rental price and the appearance of guns, Dorothy decided to look for a new Director. However, without various management skills in leadership the store eventually closed.

Of course Sister Dorothy's life did not end with this. She has received innumerable awards:

- In 1983 she was named in a brief history of women in the area for her work in the Community Help Center, the House of Bread, the Other Place, and Women Helping Women.
- In 1990 Dorothy was given the "Living the Dream" Martin Luther King award for "Many unknown, unselfish deeds done in the name of love only."
- In 1992-3 she was named Religious Sister of the Year by the Ohio State

Council of Knights of Columbus.

- In 1995 Dorothy was named to the Ten Top Women of the Year award.
- In 1997 the University of Dayton bestowed on Sister Dorothy an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters in recognition of her Erudition, Service and Achievement. The citation was: "She said she couldn't cook but she learned to feed thousands upon thousands of the hungry at the House of Bread...Sister Kammerer saw Daytonians homeless. So, she founded The Other Place, a daytime shelter for the homeless...Sister Kammerer saw Daytonians suffer from violence. So, in 1994 she founded the Interfaith Action for a Violence-Free America...She has seen suffering in the world beyond Dayton. So, now Dayton has a craft cooperative called Global Sharing, which profits needy families in 39 countries and offers employment to the poor of Dayton."

Dorothy wrote "When people say 'you have done so much,' I am terribly embarrassed because I know I could have done nothing without God's help and the tremendous amount of work done by many, many volunteers. Without the support of the Sisters of the Precious Blood and the volunteers, I could have done little." Yes, probably true. Though none of these works would have happened if you, Dorothy, had not seen the need, while others just talked about the need. You did it. You gathered people who had an interest in helping but could not have done the organization and continuation without you.

Dorothy, you have been a gift to this Congregation. You showed by example what working with the poor really is. It is the long lines, the impersonal answers, the "you can sit and wait mentality." You did not let that hinder you. You were there to serve your people.

You show us the true meaning of the works of mercy. YOU fed the hungry, YOU gave drink to the thirsty, YOU sheltered the homeless, YOU clothed the naked, YOU ransomed the captive, YOU visited the sick, and YOU buried the dead.

Many years ago in the House of Bread Bea would leave saying "Walk with God today Dorothy." Yes, today you are walking with your God.

—Sister Mary Yarger, C.P.P.S.