

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Mary Lou Voisard

BORN: March 1924

ENTERED CONGREGATION: July 1, 1939

DIED: January 26, 2012

IT is an honor for me to be able to take these few moments to reflect upon Sister Mary Lou's life. As many of you may know, Sisters Mary Lou and Elaine and I shared many years together at New Riegel cloister. What began there blossomed into a life-long friendship over the years since then. My reflections today will not emphasize so much what Mary Lou did over her long life of 87 years; rather it will focus upon who Mary Lou was.

My dear friend, Mary Lou, was in her deepest heart a contemplative. Some people would describe a contemplative as a person with extraordinary religious visions and experiences. But that is not what Mary Lou or being a contemplative is about. What it is about is being whole-heartedly involved in the long process of our transformation enfolded within the Mystery of Life.

Mary Lou liked butterflies. They reminded her of the transformative nature of the life process. This is so apparent in a butterfly's passage from a confined existence to another freer one.

Each of us as a human being so easily gets caught up in the cocoon of our own projected identity ... we are a teacher, social worker, nurse ... a success or a

failure ... a number two, three, four on the eneagram ... a religious person, a prophet. We configure so many identities for ourselves to describe who we think we are! It takes no less than the Spirit of God Who is closer to us than we are to ourselves to release us from those passing identities we have built up in our minds so that we may actually see and be who we really are.

And so, I come back to saying that Mary Lou was, in her deepest heart, a contemplative. Yes, for many years she was a teacher. For 23 years she was a cloistered person of prayer at New Riegel. This part of her life I know more intimately as we were together for 12 years at the cloister. Mary Lou was one of the original Sisters who started the New Riegel cloister. Were it not for her labors there would have been no cloister. She worked tirelessly, selflessly to establish and promote that life of prayer to which she felt the Lord was calling her.

I'm sure we can all appreciate what a struggle it must have been for her to move on from where she had planned to live out her entire life. But faithfully and with that generous heart of hers she said her "yes" to the next phase of her life as a pastoral minister at Providence hospital in Cincinnati and then

at Good Samaritan hospital here in Dayton. Mary Lou spent her remaining years here at Salem Heights serving as a spiritual director, print shop manager and tending to the plant life here in the chapel and within the motherhouse. But underlying all of these realities which make up part of Mary Lou's life story was her "yes" to that which cannot be named but which ultimately named her. It was her "yes" to being who she really was.

In 2004 Mary Lou wrote her life story up until the present period of her life. In one of her reflections regarding her retirement years she wrote "Now, at the eventide of my life, I simply want to be love, be God's presence to others, simply to be presence."

Who of us has not been touched by Mary Lou's simplicity, her generosity, her compassion for others, her tireless giving of herself, her sincerity, her devotion to prayer? Who of us did not admire her lifelong devotedness to her family, her community and her friends? And now that Mary Lou has entered into the fullness of Being we can only hope that the "yes" to our own transformation may be as faithfully uttered and as Spirit-filled as was hers.

— Virginia (Ginny) Manss