

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Virginia Beene

(Sister Mary DeLellis)

BORN: February 1918

ENTERED CONGREGATION: July 15, 1937

DIED: July 20, 2008

TODAY we gather to remember and to celebrate the life of Sister Virginia Beene, known affectionately to all of us as “Ginny.” Her sister, Marilyn [Wortman], is unable to be with us today, but we welcome and offer our sympathy to her nephew, Bill, his wife, Patty, and to Ginny’s niece, Vickie.

Verque was born to William and Audrey Chitwood Beene in February 1918, in Waldron, Arkansas. Verque was the Indian name given to her at birth; it translates into English as Virginia, the name she took when she was baptized into the Catholic Church. She was the second-oldest child in a family of four girls and one boy. The family moved to New Mexico, where her father died of polio at the age of 37. Her mother was unable to both work and care for all five children, so an aunt and uncle, Annette and Jack McWhorter, assumed responsibility for the little Beenes. Three years after her husband’s death, Audrey contracted tuberculosis and also died.

Although the Beenes were Methodists, her aunt was Catholic. With the blessing of Virginia’s mother, she had all five children baptized and educated in Catholic schools—at the Loretto Academy in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and later at San Luis Rey Academy in California. It was here that Virginia met the Sisters of the Precious Blood and, on Good Friday 1937, made the decision to enter the congregation.

When she reached Dayton, she was so homesick that she cried for over a week until, she recalled, “Sister Nathalia [Smith] said, ‘Verque, if you cry one

more day, I’ll send you home!’ That was the end of the tears.” At the time of her investment with the religious habit as a novice she received the name Sister Mary DeLellis.

Early on it was discovered that Virginia had a gift for teaching. She spent 41 years in education as a teacher of primary, intermediate and upper grades. She served as a principal for 17 of those years. Her teaching years took her to schools in Sedalia, Mo.; Cincinnati, Coldwater and Centerville in Ohio; Alameda and Escondido in California; and to Arizona, where she began Mother of Sorrows School in Tucson, a learning center at St. Thomas the Apostle in Phoenix, and a religious education program at Resurrection Parish in Tempe.

Numerous letters attest to her effectiveness as a teacher and principal, praising her for her creativity, the warmth of her personality, and the strong sense of responsibility and patriotism she instilled in her students. Five times she received the Valley Forge Freedom Foundation’s Awards in academic areas; four times the George Washington Award for promoting patriotism in her school, and once she was the recipient of the Benjamin Franklin Award as Principal of the Year.

Ginny’s unbounded energy manifested itself in other ministries: teaching CCD [religious education], engaging in parish ministry, serving as coordinator of Emma Hall, as councilor for the Central Region, and offering hospitality at the Maria Stein Center. In retirement she transferred her loving, caring spirit from youth to the elderly as volunteer at Twin Towers, a senior residence here

in Dayton and, for the last 10 years of her life, at Emma Hall.

“Doing” was part and parcel of the Ginny we knew. But it is what she brought to that doing that will live on in our memories. Her generous spirit, caring presence, eagerness to serve, attentiveness to needs, were all wrapped together in a warm, bubbly, energetic personality.

Ginny had a strong sense of gratitude for the Precious Blood congregation and once wrote: “I am proud to be a member of the community! I intend to spend my eternity in thanking and praising the Lord for all the gifts that have been given to me by this great CPPS gang!”

The source of her gratitude, energy, joy and service was her deep love for God, nourished by Eucharistic prayer and often expressed in her journaling and poetry. One of her great joys during her last days at Emma Hall was the fact that her room looked directly into the chapel — she and Jesus could see one another.

During the last few weeks of her life, Ginny often told her visitors of the prayer she said many times daily: “Jesus, Jesus, come to me. Oh how much I long for Thee. Come, Thou one I love the best....” Jesus answered her longing on July 20, a Sunday morning, gently gathering her into his arms and welcoming her home.

All the desires of her heart are now met, and we give joyful thanks for the life Ginny lived among us as we join together in this Eucharistic celebration.

—Sister Jeanette Buehler