

## IN MEMORIAM



# Sr. Rita Frances Klein

(Sister Mary Vitalis)

BORN: May 1921

ENTERED CONGREGATION: February 2, 1941

DIED: January 19, 2008

**T**ODAY we gather to celebrate the life of Sister Rita Frances.... We extend our sympathy and prayers to her two sisters, Jean and Ruth, who are not able to be with us today, and to her nephew, Don, her niece, Amy, and husband Craig, who are with us. In 2001, Sister Rita Frances asked that the following be read as her eulogy on the day of her funeral. She wrote:

"I was born in Cleveland, the oldest of four children of Joseph and Delia (Letourneau) Klein. An only son, Joseph John, Jr. died in infancy. In 1935 I graduated from Our Lady of Good Counsel School in Cleveland. My sisters, Ruth Warman and Jeanne Ferguson, reside [respectively] in Port Richey, Fla., and [Lee's Summit, Missouri].

"I received a bachelor of science degree in education from the University of Dayton, and attended summer sessions at Immaculate Heart College in Hollywood, California, and St. Joseph on the Rio Grande College in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In the summer of 1965, I was a recipient of a National Science Foundation Grant at Wright State University in Dayton. I also pursued advance studies at Cleveland State University.

"After retiring from the Cleveland Fire Department with 33 years of experience, my father purchased a small farm in Medina, Ohio. The family moved to

Medina, where I attended York High School in Mallet Creek, Ohio. The contrast between rural and city life intrigued me with its activities and the presence of the animals for which I acquired a great fancy — a pony, baby chicks, calves, ducks, rabbits, turkeys, cows and pigs! Neighboring farmers hired me to drive the horses for them as they loaded freshly mown hay onto huge flatbed wagons. Perched high on the wagon standards, I skillfully guided the aggressive team of horses through the field to the amazement of all concerned. 'And she's a city girl!' they'd exclaim. 'She's better than any boy, and she doesn't cuss the horses!' the farmers would remark.

"After high school graduation, my childhood dream of entering the convent was aroused as the excitement of farm life diminished. When I revealed my future ambition to high school friends, they remarked, 'I thought only girls who were disappointed in love joined convents.'

"On Feb. 2, 1941, my novitiate days at Salem Heights began. Sr. Veneranda [Schroeder, directress at Our Lady of Good Counsel Convent] had suggested the date as an appropriate feast day. So the two of us boarded the train and the journey to Dayton began in the midst of a snow storm! We were graciously greeted by Sr. Donata Strum, the portress.

"The most cherished years of my career

were in Arizona, from 1944 to 1949, where ministering to Mexican-American students and Pima Indians on the Salt River Reservation afforded me the opportunity to realize the experiences that were born in me as I read my magazine, *The Little M Missionary*, while a student at Our Lady of Good Counsel many years ago.

"Having taught 42 years in elementary schools in Arizona, Indiana and Ohio, I retired in 1986 from the Ottawa-Glandorf Public School where my final ten years as a career teacher were realized. In 1986, I returned to the Navajo Indian Reservation in Winslow, Ariz., to conclude my active ministry where it all began 42 years ago."

A little update following Sister Rita Frances's own words:

Sister Rita Frances retired to Salem Heights in 1992 and, over the following years, sustained a diminishment in her hearing, along with other health issues related to dementia. She chose Emma Hall as the final stop on her journey home. We thank God for the gift of fidelity that enabled her to live and minister as a Sister of the Precious Blood for 67 years.

May you rest in peace, Sister Rita Frances, and may your good works follow you.

—Sister Marita Beumer