

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Ann Catherine Merkle

(Sister Mary Imelda)

BORN: November 1923

ENTERED CONGREGATION: August 12, 1945

DIED: January 23, 2018

Having lost their third child, James, at his birth, Robert and Luella (Link) Merkle “were overjoyed” when child number four, Ann Catherine Merkle, arrived “safe and sound” on a cold November 22nd, 1923. Ann was preceded by her older sister Marie and brother Charles. The couple’s joy as parents would be complete with the fifth and final child, Rosemary. In celebration of her 60th Jubilee, Ann commented that, “I am so blessed for growing up in a good Catholic Christian home where example spoke louder than words.”

At the age of 4, Ann began to show signs of where her life would take her. She was the “leader of all the other kids on the block,” and when they played school, Ann, adorned in a black raincoat, with a rosary tied around her waist, became “the teacher.” Her father, who longed to have one of his daughters become a religious, kept his eye on Ann to fulfill that wish. Growing up in Dayton, Ohio, Ann attended St. Anthony School in east Dayton and went on to graduate from Villa Julienne High School. Fresh out of high school, Ann spent the next three years working at NCR and enjoying a healthy social life.

During these years, Ann faithfully attended daily Mass and received the Eucharist. Despite her deep commitment to her faith, something was missing; “a feeling of not being fully satisfied” continued to be with her. Reflecting back, Ann wrote, “God would never let me alone!” It was a friend from NCR that invited Ann to accompany her on a fact-finding trip to Salem Heights. Ann found Mother Magna to be very gracious and generous with her time. Ann was

awestruck by the Sisters chanting the Office in chapel and the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. The tug she felt from God grew even stronger and four weeks later, Ann returned to Salem Heights. She officially entered the Sisters of the Precious Blood on August 12, 1945, receiving the name Sister Mary Imelda. Ironically, however, her friend, Dorothy, went on to marry and raise five children.

Ann’s early practice as “the teacher” would pay off, as it appears she was predestined to share her gifts in classroom ministry for 30-plus years. Over the years, Ann earned a B.S. in education at St. Joseph’s College in Rensselaer, Indiana, and an M.S. in education at Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan. Sister Ann’s years in the classroom began with the primary grades. While she spent some years in junior high classrooms and as a principal, it was the intermediate grades that appeared to have won her heart. Sister Ann’s teaching journey began in St. Joseph, Missouri, and would include future stops in Rensselaer, Indiana; Falls Church, Virginia; Manteca, California; Mesa and Phoenix, Arizona; as well as Dayton and St. Henry, Ohio.

In 1982, Sister Ann transitioned out of the classroom, taking a position as director of religious education at the Diocese of Toledo Resource Center in Ottawa, Ohio. Later she served as DRE at Holy Rosary Parish in St. Marys, Ohio, until 1990 when she made her way back home to Dayton to serve as pastoral associate at Queen of Martyrs Parish until 1997. Sister Ann brought her years of active ministry to fulfillment with the completion of her four years serving as pastoral minister to our Sisters at Salem Heights. However, in retirement Sister

Ann continued to serve as a volunteer at Twin Towers, where she was a resident for 18 years, and in the pastoral care department at Miami Valley Hospital. Some years ago, when reflecting on her years in ministry, Ann wrote, “If I had to do it over, I would not want to change anything!”

Getting to know Sister Ann over the past few years and having an opportunity to read through notes and letters she wrote, as well as comments that were written by others about her, has convinced me that Sister Ann Merkle from a very young age embraced life and greeted each day as a gift and an adventure to be lived. Some years ago, a friend reflecting about Ann stated, “Others find joy in Ann’s presence and she finds joy in others.” This friend also enjoyed Ann’s “spontaneity.” She was not one to sit and twiddle her thumbs! Ann loved to play cards, go to movies, swim, walk in nature and to go shopping, so when any friend heard Ann utter the words “Let’s go do something!” they never knew what exactly that might mean!

In the last few months, Ann’s health was failing and she found herself in and out of Good Samaritan Hospital. As time went on, Sister became weaker with each day and it was evident that oxygen needed to be a constant companion of hers. So, on Monday morning, when God offered an invitation — which maybe sounded something like this: “Hey Ann, let’s go do something!” — spontaneous, fun-loving, adventure seeker that she was, she reached out, took hold and away she went, uttering the words, “God is Good!”

— Sister Patty Kremer