

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Verlina Mescher

(Sister Mary Benet)

BORN: February 1935

ENTERED CONGREGATION: August 30, 1951

DIED: May 17, 2020

Verlina Cecilia Mescher was born in February 1935 to Otto and Rosa (Buening) Mescher. Born at home, with no doctor to be found, her imminent arrival called forth skills that her father and her aunt may not have known they possessed as they assisted in welcoming baby number 6 into the Mescher family. Verlina was not the end of the line as seven additional children would arrive to complete the Mescher clan.

Growing up in Maria Stein, Ohio, young Verlina could not help being aware of the Precious Blood Sisters. It wasn't until the seventh grade when she attended St. John's school, due to the closing of the local public school, that she came to know the Sisters up close. Verlina felt God calling her to religious life during these preteen years but she wanted nothing to do with it. Despite her refusal to entertain God's invitation, she moved away from home at age 13 to attend high school at Fatima Hall in Dayton, Ohio. God's persistence was no match for young Verlina. At age 16 she relented and decided to give religious life a try and entered the Congregation on August 30, 1951.

At age 20, newly professed Sister Mary Benet set out for her first mission. It must have been clearly evident to the powers that be in the Congregation that as a child Verlina spent time in the kitchen at her mother's side observing and mastering skills in the culinary arts. This, coupled with her get-the-job-done demeanor, landed her the position of food service supervisor at St. Gregory Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Her arrival at St. Gregory on Good Friday must have left her exhausted. She went to bed and despite the fact that eight fire trucks showed up at St. Greg's that night, Sister Mary Benet slept peacefully as her kitchen and dining room burned to the ground. As if feeding 425 young men three times a day was not a daunting task for this young Sister, she now had to orchestrate all of this in makeshift kitchens. She gave a lot of credit to the Good Lord for making it through those early days, but knowing

Verlina's work ethic and her no-task-too-big attitude, the Good Lord clearly trusted that the task was in very competent hands.

Sister Verlina gave 26 years, 1955-1981, in food service management positions that took her from St. Gregory Seminary in Cincinnati to Fatima Hall and the Motherhouse in Dayton and culminating in her beloved Colorado where she served at St. Thomas Seminary in Denver. Her years of being in charge, cooking for large groups as well as masterfully pulling together elegant banquets, eventually took its toll on Verlina. Feeling "burnt out from being in management positions for so long," Verlina investigated other ministry options. Having discovered and fallen in love with Colorado, Colorado is where she would remain and minister in various capacities and facilities for more than 30 years.

Testing the waters outside of the kitchen, Sister Verlina took a position as a nurse aide at Aspen Care Center in 1981. Of this experience she writes: "It was here that I gained a great love and respect for the elderly." Verlina was very content in this role, but opportunity and challenge came knocking at her door and she accepted an invitation to take a position as housekeeping supervisor and assistant to the maintenance supervisor at Francis Heights/Clara Gardens in Denver, a complex of 400 apartments for the elderly and 128 low-income townhouses. Of this position, Verlina admitted, "It was a great challenge!" — one that gave her the opportunity to minister to the elderly and also afforded her the opportunity to broaden her horizons, ministering to the poor and people of many different cultures.

After six years at St Francis, it was time for a change. Sister Verlina trained as a practical nurse and took a position at The Gardens at St. Elizabeth as a personal care attendant. After a year she was asked to work in the Alzheimer's unit, where she would serve for the next 12 years. Her love and care for these "precious human beings" was only part of this ministry, as she was also called to minister to family members, helping them to "accept or not accept" and navi-

gate their path through this "puzzling disease."

Sister Verlina's health made it necessary to once again evaluate her ministry. She cut back to part time and continued to provide love and care as a private duty nurse for four elderly patients before retiring from active ministry. Upon reaching her 60th year in the Congregation, Verlina proclaimed: "I am so happy I finally responded to God's call and thank Him every day for His love, opportunities and blessings!"

Over the past month spending time with Verlina it was a great joy hearing her stories. She loved to share memories of the people and places her life had taken her — memories permanently etched in her mind and tenderly cradled in her heart.

A week ago today, as I sat beside Sister Verlina, holding her hand, gently rubbing it with my thumb, I recalled what I had heard from her in my short time walking with her on what turned out to be the final path on her journey. I remember looking at that hand and thinking, "This a well-worn hand." This hand has peeled hundreds of potatoes, rolled out dough for thousands of pies and kneaded the dough for perhaps as many loaves of bread. This is a hand that washed and dressed and gave loving care. This is a hand that cleaned and did laundry, and made beds. This is the hand that reached out to an employee, taking him aside, cleaning his feet, trimming calluses and toenails so he could walk pain free. This literally became the hand of the one who called, "Come follow me!"

Sunday morning when God reached out and called Verlina home, I can just picture it. I see her wave that hand at God and say something like, 'Oh, you don't need to come here, you have so much work to do. You go on now, I'll be OK! I'll just open that gate and let myself in! You go on now!'

Godspeed, Verlina! Rest now in peace, good and faithful servant!

— Sister Patty Kremer