

April 24, 2008

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family and Friends,

SISTER VERONICA HIRJAK had been diagnosed with lymphoma several years ago. She received chemotherapy and the cancer went into remission. It reappeared and she had chemotherapy a second time. It went into remission again. When it appeared a third time, she decided not to take any more treatment. She was at peace with her decision. When she became weaker, she was transferred to third floor of Holy Family Building for nursing care. Veronica continued to come to the main dining room in a wheelchair but soon began to take her meals upstairs. On April 16th at 8:45 AM, while the nurses were helping her, Veronica's heart gave out and she died. She was 91 years old.

Veronica was born on July 17, 1916 in Taylor Springs, IL to Andrew Hirjak and Susan Mima. She was baptized Vera Anna but was always known as Veronica. Both of her parents were immigrants from Czechoslovakia and Veronica was fluent in Slovak. She also understood Polish. She grew up in a bi-lingual household.

Veronica had one half-brother and three half-sisters from her mother's first marriage: Mary, Ann, John and Susan. Veronica went to school during the Depression. Many young people often had to leave school to go to work but Veronica was able to finish high school. She was a straight "A" student and graduated at the top of her class. She then worked for a year in a hospital laundry. When she was 19 years old, she applied to Victory Noll and was accepted on August 27, 1935.

She was part of a group of eleven young women who made first vows in 1938. It was a time of transition for our congregation. Our founder, Fr. Sigstein, stepped down as director of the congregation and the sisters elected the first superior general. Records show that Archbishop Noll was the one who interviewed Veronica before her first profession. She certainly was living in an historic time.

Veronica's first mission assignment was Holman, NM. It was one of our earliest missions and Veronica got to practice the Spanish she had studied at Victory Noll. With her multi-language background, Veronica did very well. She enjoyed teaching religion and visiting the families in this northern New Mexico town.

Veronica's long missionary life was spent in many places: **California** (Brawley, Ontario, San Pedro, Los Banos, Monterey and Redlands); **Texas** (Lubbock and Big Spring); **New Mexico** (Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Vegas); **Colorado** (Montrose, Colorado Springs and Ft. Lupton); **Missouri** (Elsberry and Neosho); **Iowa** (Delhi); **Utah** (Salt Lake City); **Wyoming** (Powell) and **Michigan** (Imlay City). In all of her assignments, Veronica served God's people to the best of her ability.

Veronica enjoyed studying theology, "for my own enrichment and to improve my teaching," she wrote. However, she was reluctant to study full time, thinking that the younger sisters should have that opportunity. She wrote, "Since my days are numbered, I rather that my 'school days' be spent on strictly religious subjects." Little did she know that God had many more years in store for her.

Veronica applied the credits she had earned at Victory Noll to summer school courses. She attended college at Siena Heights in Adrian, MI and at St. Francis College in Fort Wayne, IN. She received a Certificate in Religious Education in 1968. She continued attending summer school at Incarnate Word College in San Antonio and received a certificate in Pastoral Studies in Scripture in 1974.

Victory Noll was always dear to Veronica's heart. In writing to a sister living there, she said, "Your letter made me homesick for Victory Noll and all the nice people and nice things that happened to me there." In 1977, Veronica took a break from the missions and came to Victory Noll to be part of the staff. She served as receptionist for three years. She then went back to the missions.

In 1983 she returned to Victory Noll where she again was part of the staff. She was in charge of the laundry for eight years, a full-time job! Her duties became lighter when she started taking care of the guest rooms at Sigstein Center and helping in the sewing room and hair care room. In 1997 she began a ministry that she especially enjoyed – caring for the needs of our resident chaplain, Fr. Fahey. She made sure that his refrigerator had the essentials and that he didn't miss out on special treats from the dining room.

In 2004, at 88 years of age, she declared herself officially retired. Her spirit of hospitality, however, never flagged. She continued to welcome guests to Victory Noll and her beautiful smile made everyone feel at home. As her health began to fail, her life became more contemplative. Her prayer, printed on her memorial card, described the ending of her life: "Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

We laid Veronica to rest on April 19th. Seven family members were able to come for the funeral: Lorraine Strickland, her husband Wes and their two daughters, Stephanie and Sydney; Loretta Tokarz, her husband Mark and Mark's mother, Rita Tokarz. (Lorraine and Loretta are great-nieces, the grandchildren of Sr. Veronica's sister, Susan Martin.)

For her funeral Mass, Veronica chose the farewell words of Jesus: "In my Father's house there are many mansions. I am going now to prepare a place for you and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you to myself." (John 14:2-3) This became a reality for Veronica. We bade her farewell as Christ took her to Himself. Into God's hands she commended her spirit.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Melanie Persche". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Sr. Melanie Persche, OLVM
General Secretary