



SISTER JUSTINE KIEFER, OLVM

Sister Justine died very peacefully on January 10, 2014. Sister Mary Joan Ginsterblum, her classmate, was with her. She took her last breath and entered eternal life in the same way that she lived most of her life, calmly.

Sister Justine was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 9, 1917, to Fred Hubert Kiefer and Helen Curtin Malbeuf Kiefer. She was the eldest of four children and the only girl. She was baptized Elizabeth Helen Kiefer on December 2, 1917. She was preceded in death by her parents and two brothers, William and Fred Kiefer. Surviving is one brother, Joseph Kiefer of Oak Park, Illinois.

Sister Justine entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters on August 31, 1938 and made first vows on August 5, 1941. Her first mission was Ida, Michigan, where she served for two years before going to California. She also served in Indiana, Colorado, Texas and Illinois. She retired in 1995 and returned to Victory Noll as a clerical and receptionist volunteer.

Sr. Justine shared a story about a former seminarian she had met 50 years ago at Fort Lupton, Colorado, near Brighton. At the close of religion classes in the summer, migrant families moved into the area to work in the sugar beet fields. The seminarians of the Denver archdiocese were asked to visit families for pastoral experience and to practice their Spanish. Sister Justine was asked to prepare the seminarians for this effort and from this request came the program, "Faith In Action." Sister Justine and the seminarians met the pastoral needs of the migrant families. In 2001, Sister met one of the former seminarians who told her how much this experience had changed his life, to which Sister Justine replied, "Faith sharing is really what God asks of us in so many ways."

Sister Justine was a very intelligent woman who loved to learn. She earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology in 1948 from Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles, California; a master's degree in Counseling from St. Francis College in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1966; and a master's degree in Religious Education from Seattle University in Seattle, Washington, in 1973. Using her many gifts and talents, she was a catechist, a formation minister, an area coordinator, and a literacy teacher for prisoners, along with many other duties after retirement. During the early 1960's, she also served the Congregation as Vicar General — what we would now call Vice President. Although Mother (Sister) Florentine is often given credit for all the positive and forward thinking strategies and policies that were introduced during those years, Sister Justine was right there with her in the midst of the changes. Sister Justine was a pillar of the Congregation having significant influence at a time of great change and uncertainty. In many ways was ahead of her time in her thinking and with her insights. She also had a kind way of challenging when it was needed and knowing when to hold back.

In October of 2001, Sister Justine wrote about how she came to enter Victory Noll. She wrote, “I was born and reared of Irish and German heritage on Chicago’s south side. Since I often heard stories from my relatives and friends of their voyages to the United States, a missionary vocation held a special appeal for me. Then when our local parish offered a showing of the Victory Noll film, ‘In the Service of the Queen,’ my mother grew enthusiastic about my search for a religious vocation. After the film, I decided to visit our motherhouse in Indiana one weekend. The pastoral setting of the motherhouse and my conversations with several professed sisters of their missionary lives excited me. On my return to Chicago I talked to my parents, their enthusiasm for my choice despite being their only daughter, sold me. I applied and entered. I often thank the Lord for that movie.”

The community gathered on Sunday evening January 12, 2014, for Sister Justine’s wake and one niece, Kristen Mackey, drove down from Chicago to join us. In the sharing, the attributes of being fearless, witty, fun, neat and well-organized with never having anything left on her desk were mention again and again. She was quick to read the signs of the times and often able to understand the possible implications for our life as religious. All these, along with her deep love of chocolate, especially Fannie May chocolate, a love that never left her, will be how she will be fondly remembered.

Father Dale Bauman presided at the funeral liturgy on Monday, January 13, 2014. In his homily, he made the connection about Sister Justine always being calm in any situation. It is a model and an example to live by. He noted how change is always scary and yet Sister Justine was able to let God be in charge and not be afraid. Jesus asked Martha to believe and not to be afraid, just as he asked Sister Justine to believe and not to be afraid. Focus on Jesus and become an instrument of change, not a force against it. In all of Sister Justine's life, she was a positive force of change, from the way she approached life and allowed change to be a good, through turmoil of Vatican II and into her last years of life.

We are grateful, Sister Justine, for your faithful service in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus, for all that you did with your life for the good of the congregation, and accepting the challenges of missions and ministries that were asked of you. Finally, we, like you, thank God for that movie, too. More importantly, we thank God for your life among us, for without you our life will never be the same.

With gratitude and blessings,



Sr. Ginger Downey, OLVM

