



Sister Barbara Messman, OP

Born to earthly life: January 26, 1912
Religious profession: August 4, 1935
Entered eternal life: January 30, 2014

"I give you my peace and love."

Sister Barbara's response to the sisters' Salve the week before her death

WELL INTO HER 90S, SISTER BARBARA MESSMAN declared her new ministry would be that of **presence**. But those who knew her recognized there was nothing "new" in the way this nonagenarian related to people. Her sensitivity to everyone she encountered was apparent from one's first conversation with S. Barbara. Whether another sister, staff member, student, parent, hospital patient, neighbor, or first-time guest, all were made to feel special by S. Barbara's attentive presence to them.

Born on January 26, 1912, Barbara was the eldest of six children born to poor German immigrants John and Anna Messman. At age 13, she left the family home in Warren, MI, to work in Detroit and help support her family. She was hired as nanny for the Girardot family, caring for their two children, Peter and Felice. "They treated me like one of their own," she lovingly recalled. Throughout her life she stayed connected to Peter and Felice and their children. *(Even though Peter was crushed when Barbara entered the convent, as at age 10 he had decided to marry her someday!)*

Barbara enjoyed attending Mass with the family and became interested in their Catholic faith. As a teenager she learned to pray by listening to the children's nightly prayers, and after two years, she received the sacraments. At age 20, she entered the Racine Dominicans, attracted because "I knew they had a chapel in every house." She received the name Sister Columba, and for the next 40 years taught first through 12th grade students. In the late 1960s, she returned to her baptismal name.

S. Barbara taught in many different schools around Wisconsin & Michigan. She moved so frequently, in fact, she thought she must be a "problem sister." She approached S. Theodore, who served on the General Council, "who always told me the truth, pleasant or otherwise. After a pause, [S. Theodore] said, 'No, you are not a problem Sister; no matter what we give you to do, you manage it.'"

S. Barbara managed situations effectively because she never shrank from difficulties. After a successful teaching career, she enthusiastically moved on to create the new position of ombudsperson at St. Luke's Hospital in Racine. Ever gentle, but direct and honest in her approach, "She patiently stayed with each issue until it was resolved," noted S. Brenda Walsh, St. Luke's chaplain at the time.

S. Barbara continued to challenge herself throughout her life. In her 80s, she decided she should learn something new each year. One year it was basketry; another year the computer; at 88, she learned the cello.

Even at age 101, S. Barbara continued to "face things head on," S. Agnes Johnson reflected. As the new sisters' residence neared completion in December, S. Barbara recognized the challenge of facing two more moves in her life. "With grace and dignity, she chose to move to Lakeshore, difficult though that decision was," S. Agnes shared. The wisdom in her choice soon became apparent as her health declined and her body weakened. Realizing S. Barbara's death was not far off, sisters gathered at her Lakeshore bedside on January 24 to bless her and sing the Salve in sending her forth. Appreciating the love that enfolded her, S. Barbara raised her hand, blessing her sisters with "my peace and love."