

Fall 2005



Sr. Rebecca Brennan - Memorial

Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you, Sr. Rebecca, by name. Come and follow me, Bonnie, I will bring you home; I love you, Beckie, and you are mine. This song celebrates the final moment and call of our dear Sister Rebecca Brennan.

Bonita (Barr) Brennan was born on February 2, 1946, in Kansas City, Missouri, and was the oldest girl in a family of five children. When Bonnie was just a toddler, her mother married John Brennan, who accepted and raised Marjorie's two children, Jack and Bonnie, as his own. Sr. Rebecca often said that John was "her real father" and he always reciprocated as such.

In 1952 at the age of six, Bonnie was baptized at Christ the King Parish in Kansas City, MO. Recounting the story on the day before she died, Sr. Rebecca said, "I can remember it clearly. Even at six I knew that this was a momentous event in my life."

As a second grader in Catholic school, she listened to the stories of the saints and the desire to become a saint grew in her heart. Influenced by the example of a Sister who was her fourth grade teacher and by her friend Judy Lynch, (now Sr. Judith), she began to consider a religious vocation. After attending a vocation week at our Provincial House in Savannah, she became convinced that God was calling her to religious life and made plans to attend our aspirancy high school. This was typical for her. Once she made up her mind that God's will was moving her in a certain direction, she took action. Having completed her novitiate, she committed her life to God as a religious by professing her vows on August 4, 1964. Shortly after that she began her teaching career, first at St. Therese School in Parkville, MO, and later at Bishop Hogan Memorial School in Chillicothe, MO. Sr. Rebecca worked with the first graders and brought her own unique and creative flair to the task. It was difficult to determine who was having the most fun, the children or Sr. Rebecca! But the results of her educational undertaking were very clear by the end of each year. The children unfailingly were able to read and write very well.



As the years passed and times changed, her teaching assignment evolved into educating new members as Director of Formation for our religious community and working as Vocation Director. In 1987, as her health began to decline and other tasks proved to be too strenuous, the desire to minister in the healthcare field as a hospital chaplain seemed to be a good fit for her. She completed a CPE course at Bethany Medical Center in Kansas City, Kansas, and became a certified fellow in the College of Chaplains. Not long after she became Director of Hospital Ministry for the Johnson County Kansas Catholic community until 1992, when illness prevented her from continuing to work.



Sister Beckie and her mom, Marjorie Brennan, who was also a Co-disciple of our community.

As readers of our newsletters may remember, Sr. Rebecca wrote an article about what she called her "ministry of suffering." Over the years the rare disease she had inherited from her birth father, Osler-Weber-Rendu Syndrome, caused serious nosebleeds and internal hemorrhages. Along the way she was diagnosed and treated for thyroid cancer and also had many other surgeries which were the result of complications of her bleeding disorder. A quote from Bernard Haring's Heart of Jesus is indicative of Sr. Rebecca's philosophy of life. *"It is not worthwhile to dedicate one's life for any cause inferior to that of love or to work hard for anything that is not inspired by redeeming love and does not serve its cause. But the cause of love for which Christ came is, indeed, worth all dedication and even all sufferings."* Many wondered how she could endure her life-long illness. Her indomitable, determined spirit endured throughout each hospitalization, and it was almost impossible for her to "give up." These repeated hospitalizations, the ongoing debilitation and pain, the near death experiences, each change in Sr. Rebecca's life and the final struggle to let go was a part of her suffering. But it did not prevent her from enjoying life. In fact, her reluctance to make the decision to suspend all treatment came from her great love of life, even when its quality was much less than desired. From playing cards with family or community members, to writing letters of encouragement to her friends and family, to everyday conversations about anything and everything, (My! That girl could talk!), Sr. Rebecca brought joy and hope to others. As she wrote in her "Redemptive Suffering" article, "We are called to fill up what is lacking in the suffering Body of Christ. It is the Lord's grace that helps us endure. We do not boast of our sufferings, but rather boast of God's work within us."



The recent visit with her family.

Despite the pain and daily discomfort, her faith in God never faltered. Her daily meditation and prayer gave her strength to continue. Everyone who visited her during the last months of her life witnessed the way she used every "stable" moment to its fullest. She so delighted in the visit of her family a few weeks before her death. And on the evening before her death, she thoroughly enjoyed the celebration of her

anniversary of profession and nameday. In the ICU one hour before her death she said, "At least I got to have my 41st anniversary celebration." Despite her extremely labored breathing, she spoke of her family and friends. But the pain was very bad. Finally she said: "Whatever happens is up to God." It was clear that she was willing to do whatever the Lord required of her, as she had sought to do throughout her life.

Sr. Rebecca, who loved to celebrate, left this world on the eve of the beautiful Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ. Having been called by the Lord since Baptism and having responded to this call through religious profession and by an exemplary life of Christian love and service, Sr. Rebecca Bonita Brennan answered this last call on August 5, 2005, at 7:45 P.M. at Heartland Medical Center in St. Joseph, MO. She began the most wondrous celebration of life with her Lord, transfigured with Him in glory. We thank God for the gift of her life to our Franciscan community and to God's Church.

2005 JUBILARIANS



Sr. Ancilla Grovijohn, OSF - 65 years

Sixty-five years is a long time to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Sr. Ancilla is stepping along very well despite the mileage! Although she left the classroom many years ago, she is still a teacher - sharing her way, her creativity and her faith journey with those around her. On her rounds of passing the mail to the elderly at LaVerna Village, her calming and consoling presence brings joy. She makes a conscious effort to fulfill the saying we have often used in our printed material there: "Lifting spirits, lifting hearts," and by doing just that, her visits have helped to foster a deeper spirituality and a more contented acceptance of God's will.

In addition to continuing to take care of the Sisters' dining room, no small task as it entails clean up after meals and organizing and replenishing of supplies, she now has taken on responsibility for most of the plants in the house. A life-time learner and seeker of knowledge, she has sought out information concerning this new endeavor, greatly aided by her niece, Bobbie, an expert "Green-Thumber." By shouldering the burden of these and other routine, but necessary tasks, Sr. Ancilla is a support to all despite often hectic timetables. She is always willing to step in to take the place of absent Sisters or staff, and this spirit of readiness is much appreciated.



Sr. Ancilla with students from St. Rose School of Religion.

Having completed a monumental task of embroidery in the form of an exquisite linen tablecloth sold at the last LaVerna Fundraiser Dinner and Auction, she has now embarked on several other stitchery projects not meant for the faint of heart. Perhaps those who attend the next dinner may have a chance on bidding for these wonderful treasures.

Sr. Ancilla, though busy, still finds time for reading, reflection and prayer. She loves to use spiritual authors to nurture her awareness of the presence of God and the precious moments of each day: "God's minute" in her life. Her journey is enlightened by her communion with the Divine and it is by this grace that she brings life to others.



Franciscans Sr. Dorthie Anne and Sr. Ancilla enjoy a moment's commune with nature in the form of two very soft and cuddly ducklings.



Sr. Dorthie Anne Hall, OSF - 25 years

Prayer is a Hunger

Prayer is a hunger born with us,
It is as present as breath and beat
Of heart. It calls to Him who gave
It when He gave the soul...
Prayer is a hunger deep in all,
It sings, it weeps, it longs for the
Face of God, not to be seen ♦il we die.

Prayer is for the living and the dead:

Prayer is my deepest bond with you;

We join each other in prayer's daily search;

We take ourselves and our hunger to God

And we are bread for each other.

-- An excerpt taken from a poem by Sr. Dorthie Anne

Poet, educator, community member...Sister Dorthie Anne Hall celebrates 25 years of profession as a religious sister. Her path to religious life led her from her upbringing in the Baptist church in her beloved home state of Kentucky, to teaching high school English before becoming an instructor of English and literature at the then Northwest State College in Maryville, Missouri. During her tenure there she became interested in the Catholic faith, and sought spiritual direction from one of the monks at Conception Abbey. After her baptism in January, 1950, desiring to commit herself to religious life, she joined our community in December of the same year in Chillicothe, where she taught English and literature at St. Joseph Academy.



Taking a leave from religious life, Sister Dorthie Anne continued her love of teaching at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge from 1962 until her return to religious life in 1978. As she states in one of her writings: "God was not finished with me yet! So He, St. Francis and the Franciscans of Savannah, reclaimed me." Sister Dorthie Anne professed vows on July 5, 1980.

"Continuing her teaching career, Sr. Dorthie Anne taught English composition and literature to students at Donnelly College in Kansas City, Kansas from 1978 until 1991. As a fellow colleague wrote in a recommendation for the Burlington Northern Award for teaching said, "Sr. Dorthie Anne is an excellent instructor in every sense of the term, and she has proved herself in adjusting to changing needs of education without abandoning her principles or standards....I know of no other instructor who

knows more about the subject matter of her profession or who is more enthusiastic about her mission of leading students to improvement."

"Perhaps, as displayed in the two samples given, her greatest love beyond teaching is as a writer of poetry. She writes prolifically and has been published and recognized in various magazines and newspapers and by many organizations, most recently the Famous Poets Society for her poem "Duke-Man of Faith". In addition to writing poetry, Sister Dorthie Anne enjoys reading and critiquing editorialists and columnists in the Kansas City Star. Weekly they receive her reactions to their ideas and opinions.

Today Sister Dorthie Anne continues to instill in both children and adults a love for learning. Following her resignation from teaching in college, she began teaching GED classes to adults in the local Community Action Partnership Program, sometimes even giving classes in the local jail! Today she continues to tutor both adults and children. As she states, "It is a busy life and a happy one! I find each of my 87 years better than the last one."



They Are of Francis

The singing days moved on leaving His love,
In measure large to match your loving hearts.
Your common spirit, born here, borne above,
Carrying His love in warmest darts.
Each season carried its own deepest grace,
Each Sister shared her gifts from gracious God,
And in her sisters saw with love Christ's face,
And knew that on each vowed heart He had trod.
As days yielded to nights, again to days,
The love of Francis swelled in warmest surge;
Clare's gentleness shone softly, but sent rays
To quicken, to strengthen each holy urge.
I will not, do not leave you; no, never,
For this love there is no way to sever.
-- Sr. Dorthie Anne Hall, OSF (written in 1997)



Sr. Barbara Hanses, OSF - 25 years

"Two roads diverged...and I - I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference" (from Robert Frost's The Road Not Taken). Our jubilarian, Sister Barbara Hanses took a road to Dayton, Ohio, in 1976 and intersected a pathway taken by Sisters Antoinette and Mary Ellen, who also were attending the conference on second career vocations. Sr. Barbara claims: "The Lord brought us together." This was a fulfillment of her heart's desire since her grade school days - to become a religious and serve her Lord in this way of life.

Sister Barbara knows the blessings of the Lord upon her and her six children and their families - seven grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. Having young grandchildren around the convent was a new experience for our community. As Patsy and Stephanie said to their mother, Sr. Barbara's daughter Virginia, upon their first visit, "It is different! Why do we need permission from Grandmother to go upstairs?" Son Raymond on one of his visits was giving motorcycle rides to the sisters - you should see these pictures! Yes, her children supported her decision to enter religious life, for "they knew that this was a life-long dream of mine and realized how important it was to me," remembers Sr. Barbara.



At work in the business office.



Sr. Barbara with her family.

It was on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, February 2, 1980, when Sr. Barbara spoke the words of the day's liturgy: "Here I am, Lord. Send me!" This continued on in her service over these 25 years, especially through her time as personnel director and bookkeeper for La Verna Heights Retirement Center. Her skills as a typist and organizer for the General Council Division at City Hall in Chicago have served us well in her secretarial positions on the boards of our nursing homes, in community work, in servicing sisters' medical payments, and in service on the boards of local organizations.

Having been a mother, she was a natural to serve as coordinator of the unwed mothers program working with the offices of Catholic Charities. She says that she was blessed to help with 60 deliveries! When HIV/AIDS became a part of our lives, she was a first-line participant in the St. Joseph Mayor's Task Force on AIDS and a Good Samaritan Project volunteer in Kansas City.

Sister Barbara also was a member of the Victim Advocacy Program as a court advocate and volunteer at the YWCA shelter for abused and battered women. She continues her works of charity as our liaison to Andrew County Ministries, serving on the local RSVP board and in providing entertainment as a Jolly Music Maker to area nursing homes. Her service as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Christian Brothers Religious Medical Deductible Trust gives her the opportunity to return to Chicago twice yearly for meetings and gatherings with family and friends.

Sister has served our community as a member of our provincial council, as our local community superior, by driving unmeasured miles in chauffeuring the sisters to various appointments, and in a special way of being in prayer and presence with so many of our sisters in the final hours of their lives.

What does Sister Barbara say? "My work has brought me close to the heart of Francis who sought out the despised and rejected of society. I never dreamed this would be possible. It's just fantastic that the Lord has led me through my life to this point. He just never lets go! Thank you, Lord, for the continued blessings!"