

## Obituary



Sister Teresita Marie Nazario, IHM, 87, died on Monday, Dec. 24, 2018, at the IHM Senior Living Community in Monroe.

Sister Teresita was born on May 15, 1931, to Angel and Margarita Nazario. Her parents were natives of Puerto Rico, and, as such, she spent her early childhood in New York City and Puerto Rico. She was baptized Ethel Edith in Sagrado Corazon de Jesus Parish in Santruce, Puerto Rico. Ethel and her brother, Carlos, had much opportunity to grow in the heritage of Puerto Rico surrounded by extended family. She attended the parish's elementary and high schools, graduating in 1951. She entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe in 1952 and received the religious name Sister Teresita.

Sister Teresita spent her early teaching ministry with elementary, often kindergarten, students at St. Joseph Dexter, Mich., Holy Trinity, Detroit, and San Joachin and Santa Teresita in Puerto Rico. She began collegial studies at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico and when returning to Michigan in the summers, she studied and earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College. Her ministry in education continued in the late 1970s and 1980s as principal at Colegio Sagrada Familia and at Escuela Bella Vista, as well as teaching at Escuela Luis Pereira Leal and at San Augustin, Puerto Rico.

In 1995, her ministry focus shifted to pastoral work while residing in Guaynabo and San Juan. As her health began to decline in 2006, Sister Teresita moved to the IHM Motherhouse (Monroe) to seek physical assistance and renew many friendships with the sisters of the Monroe community.

## Remembering

Today we celebrate, with great thankfulness, the life of our dear Sister Teresita Marie Nazario. She was a Puerto Rican born in 1931 on Long Island, N.Y. She was given the name Ethel Edith Nazario. Her father was a successful businessman who traveled between Santurce, Puerto Rico and New York. Teresita did not have many memories of her mother who died when she was a child. Rather, she remembered fondly her grandmother who raised her. She has a younger brother, Carlos, who lives in North Carolina. Carlos and his wife Arline have two daughters and several grandchildren.

Teresita entered the IHM congregation in June 1952, along with Juanita Bernard (Sister Guadalupe). They were the first two women from Puerto Rico who joined the IHM congregation. Having flown to Florida, they stayed at St. Michael, Miami, for a few days

and then continued their journey by train. Because they arrived three months early, they spent those months with the class that would be received into the Novitiate in August 1952. During that time, they became more accustomed to speaking English and to the food and climate of the mainland United States. That August, they became part of the postulant class of 1952. They were received on May 31, 1953, and made their first profession of vows in August 1955.

There are many anecdotes of those times that can make us laugh. Teresita was a good storyteller and could liven up a party telling stories of things that happened, especially during those first years. She spoke very lovingly of her experience in the postulancy. She said Sister Marie Elise was very kind to her and the postulants and others were kind as well. Not always was it easy being the first Puerto Ricans in the congregation. Teresita mentioned that she had no hard feelings toward anyone in her past. She said she always let go of the hard things. "It's foolish to carry them around," she said.

Many of her anecdotes involved incidents in collusion with her sister and best friend Juanita, during their postulancy. One of them happened when Teresita had the grand inspiration to change their already worn-out daily shoes for a new pair. As most of us may know, the shoes were distributed to the sisters upon their arrival to the convent and when they needed to be changed, the sisters had to make a petition to the mother superior. Teresita and Juanita were able to overcome all types of obstacles successfully, reaching to where the shoes were stored without getting caught. However, they only wore them for a couple days. After Sister Catherine Sienna asked them if they were wearing their summer shoes, their conscience and desire to be good sisters made them return the shoes before anybody else noticed.

Another anecdote is related to Sister Marie Elise and the 1952 novitiate class. When during the summertime the class gathered outside in the Lilac Court, Teresita and Juanita suggested a game, the barnyard, in which everybody would make the sound of the animal that they were told. Little did Sister Marie Elise realize that Teresita and Juanita whispered to everyone else: "Don't say nothing. Don't say nothing." When the time came for the countdown, one, two, three, the only sound heard, was the sound of the donkey by Sister Marie Elise.

Learning a second language makes anybody humble, undeniably. At the same time, the learning experience could be the context of good laughs, as when Teresita was having supper in the convent, and all of the sudden, she whispered: "Please pass the stinkers" instead of the smelt, or the little fish at the table.

Regarding Teresita's experience post-novitiate, her mission life began in Dexter, Mich. where she taught kindergarten for one year. She loved her ministry there. From there, she ministered two years at Holy Trinity in Detroit. She returned to her beloved Puerto Rico, where from 1958 to 1972 she taught in the primary grades in Cayey, Adjuntas and Santurce. During those years, she attended the Catholic University of Puerto Rico during the summer months and on Saturdays. She received her bachelor's degree in 1967.

Teresita ministered for five years as principal of Holy Family Elementary School in Santurce, Puerto Rico. From there, she entered teaching in the public school system on the island. She taught elementary grades in schools in poorer sectors of the cities where she lived. Of those years she wrote, "Never have I felt so happy in my work ... It has been a new beginning; and truly I love all these children, and I feel called by the Lord to continue in this work, with these children and adults who are the least privileged."

During the period where Teresita taught in various public schools, she took a year away in 1985 for a sabbatical in Madrid, Spain. She had always loved the traditions of Spain, especially their music and Spanish dances. She even played the castanets for special occasions. During this renewal, Teresita took some additional courses in theology, which she loved, and received a diploma in pastoral ministry. For her, this was an opportunity to enjoy the culture, to visit sisters, friends and, of course, to have a good time.

In 1993, Teresita began doing volunteer ministry with the poor in San Juan. She loved the young people she met while doing this ministry. Teresita also helped the women in her neighborhood, praying with them and driving them to the doctor.

Anyone who knew Teresita knew that she was a great hostess. She was always ready to go places. She loved to go out to eat, to shop and to have a good time. Teresita often managed to get tickets to theatre events, including, on occasion, acquiring tickets to the governor's own reserved seats! Her favorite sentence until her last days was: "¡Vámonos! Let's go!" No wonder the names of both of us were changed to: "*Vente conmigo*" y "*Voy contigo*": "Come with me" and "I'll go with you." "Vámonos let's go," implies movement, shifting to a new place or space. Teresita's ways of living her life teach us that no matter our circumstances or conditions, there is always a possibility to move on and transform ourselves with gratefulness and peacefulness.

Connected with this, Teresita also shared a profound spirituality rooted in a close loving relationship with God, whom she acknowledged as Father, Spouse, and the One who held her in the palm of His hands. The personal notes in her Bible reflect the depth and trust of this relationship. In the good times as well as in the most challenging and painful moments, like when she had several surgeries the same year and when she moved to Michigan for good, Teresita rested in her faith and prayer.

Teresita's spirituality led her to live the deep meaning of being God's child. She was God's child indeed and she knew it and loved it, wanting nothing more. The following prayer that she wrote in her journal was a mantra for her:

God, teach me to love You more and more everyday.  
This is the only Way, Father, in which I will be happy.  
Gift me, Oh Lord, with a lot of Faith.  
May I always have Your Way in my mind.  
This is the Way of Faith.

Thus, as we acknowledge this intimate relationship that she shared with God, it is not hard for those of us who knew Teresita, to appreciate and respect how much she wanted to be "pretty" for her Lover. In this context, she described herself as "the coqueta del Senor," (the Lord's Coquette). This was evident in her nice taste for make-up, dresses and accessories.

This quality was appreciated and celebrated by many people who loved her. For example, in one of her visits to Sister Regina's mother, Teresita's ways of sharing her loving support was putting make-up and perfume on Mrs. Fanning, as well as modeling the new dresses that she just bought. When Teresita returned to Puerto Rico, Mrs. Fanning commented: "This is so quiet now."

Needless to say, as an animal lover, when she returned to the Motherhouse, she brought with her, her beloved and popular cat, Rocky, and together they took up residence in Memory Care.

When interviewed for her biography she was asked if she was afraid to die. "No, why be afraid when Jesus says, 'Come?'" was her response. And she was not afraid when the invitation came. She left with song of the Magnificat, with great peace reflected in her face.

She loved her patron saint, the Little Flower, and had her picture just inside the door of her room. She said, "We must be childlike – Jesus loves us to be childlike." And that's how she learned to live, being childlike, relying on God as the center of her life, as a faithful sister, servant of her Loved One. Teresita knew that all is about love. Her words reflect this:

The only and true thing that I want wholehearted  
is a heart with great love, particularly for the most marginalized.  
I want to be remembered only for this.  
I want to be a special, exceptional person that has in mind other people always.  
This is rare in our World now.  
Loving God, give me a heart where everyone fits.  
God, I want a heart, I want a heart in solidarity, I want a generous heart.

My sisters and brothers, like Teresita, I invite you: Let's go! Let's meet Life in our midst!  
Let's love! Let's celebrate God's goodness in us, in the Universe! Let's continue  
celebrating our dear Teresita, God's special child.

Delivered by Lisandra Pedraza, IHM, Dec. 28, 2018

Written by Roberta Richmond, IHM, and Lisandra Pedraza, IHM, with the help of  
Juanita Bernard, IHM, Candyce Rekart, IHM, and Mary Ann Markel, IHM. Some of  
Claudia Bennett's interview of Sister Teresita for her 60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee is also included.