

Sister Mary Justus Moore, IHM January 24, 1919- January 8, 2003

The parents of Sister Mary Justus, Harry and Elsie Moore, were natives of Mt. Clemens, Michigan. They had been life long friends, attending St. Mary School together and bragging about being in Sister Miriam's orchestra. Harry walked Elsie home and carried her books each night. The Sisters had scolded him, but Mother Teresa and Sister Miriam said, "Let them go."

When they were twenty-three, Harry and Elsie were married at St. Peters. The next year they were blessed with their first baby girl, Bernice Rita Moore. Two days later on January 26, 1919, Bernice was baptised. Two boys and five girls would follow.

In her autobiography, Sister reports that theirs was a happy, musical family, often preparing entertainment sponsored by the American Legion, Civic Chorus or school. During vacations they loved giving plays for the neighbors. Bernice kept the children occupied, practicing in the garage. When they presented their shows, Mr. Moore, a trained tenor, was a featured soloist. Mrs. Moore played the violin accompanied by one of the girls. Even at ten cents a head, a tidy sum could be earned to treat the cast and purchase crepe paper for costumes for the next production.

It must have been at this early stage that Sister honed her skills of producing school shows. They featured casts equal to the number of students in the school and raised much-needed funds while giving students an opportunity to shine. When I was a student at St. Michael's in Flint, I remember her "Cecil B. deMille" programs in the gym, hundreds in costume, bleachers overflowing with parents and friends, Sister Mary Justus, in her glory, aided by that seemingly boundless energy and drive.

When Bernice was in the ninth grade, her teacher, Sister Jane Patricia, suggested that the students go to Mass every day in May in honor of our Blessed Mother. Bernice persuaded one of her sisters to go with her to six-thirty Mass. They sang hymns to our Lady all the way to the Church and back. Bernice carried the soprano; her sister sang alto.

Bernice called on our Lady to enlighten her as to what God wanted her to do with her life. On June 12, 1935, at the end of her tenth grade year, with her parents' consent and blessing, Bernice accompanied the Sisters to Monroe to become a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She received the name, Sister Mary Justus.

Her devotion to our Blessed Mother flourished during the novitiate. Seven times in later years, Sister was sent to missions named for our Lady. Three summers were spent at IHM in Westchester, Illinois. Some other assignments included Gesu in Detroit, Sacred Heart, Dearborn, St. John, Fenton, the Hall of the Divine Child, St. Matthew, St. Michael and Powers High in Flint.

Wherever Sister was assigned, she erected a shrine to our Lady. This included a shrine to our Lady of Fatima at the end of B corridor on third floor in the Motherhouse.

Sister's career in Catholic education began in the primary grades but later advanced to more and more art and music classes, and for the last twelve years, sewing classes in junior and senior high at St. Mary of Redford. In addition, she delighted in making costumes and scenery or drilling musical numbers for school programs.

Her ability to obtain material and make costumes is legendary. I recall a story about Sister Marie Lenore Murphy "helping" Sister Mary Justus make costumes. The sewing machines were the kind that worked through pedal power. Sister Marie Lenore, pedaled deliberately, and after carefully sewing perfect seams, was pleased to announce that she had completed one costume. At the next machine, Sister Mary Justus never missed a beat, pedaling at warp speed, while dropping another costume on a gigantic pile of garments completed in the same space of time.

Sister Mary Justus was also a shameless beggar. How often she commandeered a ride from a parishioner or school parent to ask a store clerk for all of their empty shoe boxes for a project (oh, a hundred will do) or walking into Hudson's to inquire as to what they intended to do with their window dressings or other store decorations after the season. Invariably she returned with her mortified companion, loaded with useful supplies for the next program.

After fifty years of active educational ministry, Sister chose to explore a different avenue of service for God and the Community. In June of 1989 she "retired" to the Motherhouse to do things she had always enjoyed. She busied herself with artistic activities in the Creativity Center, but especially enjoyed serving God in her neighbor by sewing, altering clothing, mending, decorating, fixing up, rearranging and in general seeking to do anything to be of help to her Sisters.

At St. Mary of Redford, we continued to depend on Sister Mary Justus to keep us informed of Community happenings and to help with the wrapping of school gifts at Christmas. She was always looking for useful materials for school, sets of letters and other bulletin board materials that still had life in them.

Last Sunday, Sister Joan McGrath, said, "We've got to go up and to see Sister Mary Justus before we leave." I said, "We can't go up there, Sister told us they all have the flu." Sister Joan pushed the up button on the elevator. Sure enough we were greeted with a reminder about the flu danger as soon as we arrived on 3rd floor. I was for reaching for the down button, but Sister Joan said we would just stand by Sister's door. There was only a moment to inquire about Sister's health, to thank her for all she had done for us and tell her we loved her. What a blessing to have had that opportunity to say goodbye to such a faithful friend.

At Sister's golden jubilee celebration and later her retirement party at St. Mary's, the faculty wrote their good wishes on cards in the form of lifesavers because Sister was everywhere at school and always so willing to help out in any way she could. The following verses from those occasions encapsulate her life as we knew her.

Good-hearted, Generous, Sister Mary Justus Moore, IHM

So many years of rainbow hues
Reds and yellows, greens and blues.
Never a task too big or too small,
Throughout her life she did them all.
A seamstress of no mean estate,
A person who was never late
Liturgist, singer, artist, shopper,
Once she started it was hard to stop her.

Kind and generous, friendly and caring,
Always willing to do some sharing.
Ever on the go through sunshine and rain
Courageously facing sorrow and pain.

Her smile was sweet,
Her heart forgiving,
She was ever ready to get on with living.
Her gifts to St. Mary's could never be counted
Like gold at the end of a rainbow
They mightily mounted.

With deep gratitude for all she had done
As rainbow hues softened into shades of setting sun
We wished her God's blessings
And peace every day
As she retired and came home to Monroe
To follow God's way.

As her sun set, and the curtain came down
She headed for heaven with gifts that abound
And when she reached those golden gates
St. Michael surely had to wait
While she searched around for a boy or two
To tote bright bolts of red and blue,
Paint and silk flowers and some songs she knew

As through those gates she did surely trod
Full of ideas for Michael and God!

Sister Loretta Schroeder, IHM