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Notable Daughters of Charity (3): Sister Loretto Ryan, D.C. (1894-1981)

BY FRANCES RYAN, D.C.

For those who have not known her, the question emerges, "What makes Sister Loretto Ryan 'notable'?" Unpredictable, quick witted, with a dry sense of humor and a steady pattern of common sense, Sister Loretto was to forge the way for those in formation. She was not only influential in many vocations coming to the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity but also in sustaining those in formation and on the missions.

Sister Josephine Oldani commented that Sister Loretto was a remarkable woman. She had a strong presence and was a constant support to others. Being people-oriented, she took risks to help them with a deep and sincere concern. Sister Loretto had genuine compassion and sensitivity to family ties in a time when these relationships were not acknowledged. She did not give wishy-washy answers. Her prayer life and contemplative spirit can best be described as an "ascetism for others." She fasted and mortified herself, not for the perfection of self, but in her pleading and interceding for others. Sister Josephine remarked, "Late in the evening, Sister Loretto could be generally found in front of the Holy Eucharist."

Beginnings

There was no doubt about it. Loretto was born into an Irish, Catholic family. Her father, John Joseph Ryan was from County Tipperary, Ireland. Her mother Catherine Collins was born in America, after Loretto's grandfather, Timothy Collins, had brought his family from Abbeyfeale in County Limerick. John and Catherine were married on 26 November 1890 in Detroit. In seeking work, the Ryans moved to Saint Patrick's parish, Chicago, settling into a house on Morgan Street. From 1892 to 1904, eight children were born, including two sets of twins.

After Marie, the eldest daughter, the first set of twins were Loretto and John, born 15 May 1894, followed by another, Walter and Harry, born in 1896. Francis Aloysius, fondly called "Packey," was born on 7 August 1898; Timothy on 1 March 1901; and Edmund on 21 March 1904.

At the turn of the century, Loretto was six years of age, and Saint Patrick's school awaited her. In telling her six brothers about what she was learning, Loretto discovered early her talent of being a teacher. She was old enough to help her mother care for her brothers and had a particular concern for the two youngest, Tim and Eddie. At an early age, Loretto seemed to perceive her mother's quiet but persistent spirit of turning to God.

By 1909 Loretto was a charter member of Saint Patrick's church choir. With a large family and many friends, the Grand Central Station of the Ryan household was a source of happy times for Loretto. The O'Leary and Healy families were especially close. Mrs. Healy was known to make the best pies in the neighborhood, and Loretto would lead the boys over to enjoy them. Loretto joined a special group called the "Eight Lonely Maidens." Three Daughters of Charity besides Loretto emerged from this group, namely, Sister Margaret O'Leary, Sister Verena, and Sister Mary Bernard Healy.

When Loretto was fourteen, her mother was frequently missing from the Ryan kitchen, and Aunt Nan became more and more a part of the Ryan household. Catherine Ryan, at the age of thirty-nine, was diagnosed as having leukemia. Loretto learned that her mother was dying slowly and had no more than two years to live. She did not share this information with her younger brothers. Catherine had special devotion to a young Carmelite nun, Therese of Lisieux, who had recently died at the turn of the century. Loretto's avidity for learning became subdued as her thoughts turned to her family. She was absent from school more often as her mother's illness progressed. Joining with her Aunt Nan, she became more and more a mother to her six brothers. On 3 October 1911, the feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux, Catherine Collins Ryan died peacefully, surrounded by her family. Loretto was sixteen; she quit school to take over full household duties for the family.

Her brother, Tim, wrote that after his mother's death Loretto assumed all the duties of running the home. Their father worked a twelve-hour day, and Loretto made all the meals and took care of the household cleaning. "The reason 'cooking' is mentioned especially, is that her home-made raisin bread created an aroma that is still with all those who had the pleasure of eating her wonderful bread."

The Ryans had an upright piano which Loretto played, and when there was a party at home, all the neighbors enjoyed the singing and playing as much as the Ryan family. Loretto endeavored to keep the family together but it was difficult, at times, because of the loss of her mother and her young age.

Her younger brother, Francis, went to the seminary in Baltimore. The neighborhood boys teasingly called him Packey, after Packey McFarland, a famous boxer, because he loved books and did not know how to fight. It was a name that remained with him throughout life. On the frail side, Packey could not breathe properly in the summer heat, and asked Loretto to send an inhalator for his room in the seminary. She wrote back that "if the love of God didn't get him through the seminary, he could 'come home'!" Whether Tim won the gold medal in eighth grade or Eddie was in the school play with only one line -- "he didn't steal the pig at all; he only played his flute," which all the Ryans could recite with him -- Loretto was there to encourage her brothers.

Two influences in her life during these years were Aunt Nan, who encouraged her to make decisions for herself, and Sister Genevieve Tyson of Saint Patrick's school, who encouraged her to consider the Daughters of Charity. When Margaret O'Leary decided to enter the Daughters of Charity, Loretto wanted to go with her. She was twenty-three, and although her father gave her some resistance because she would leave the family, Loretto made her decision and wrote the following on 29 July 1977: "Sixty years ago last night, I took the midnight train for St. Louis to begin my postulatum. Lots of water has run under the bridge since then, but with God's grace and His help, I have survived. For that favor, I am grateful."

From July through October 1917 Loretto postulated at Mullanphy Hospital in Saint Louis, Missouri. Sister Cyrilla Verhalen, who was in the seminary with "Sister Ryan," recalled that on a hot summer day "she had no scruples about taking a big drink out of a pitcher of water in the Seminary Directress' office, but when she saw the Directress' eyes through the open crack of the door, she all but dropped the pitcher." The deep foundation of prayer sustained her during this time away from her family and formation. Sister Loretto received the habit on 19 August 1918.

Saint Stephen's School

Sister Loretto's first assignment was to Saint Stephen's school, New Orleans, Louisiana. Sister Ignatia Brown was her first sister servant and

a treasured friend. There were twelve Daughters of Charity in the Saint Stephen's community. Sister Aurelia Hogan was another close companion and life-long friend. Sister Maureen Bannister recalls that Saint Stephen's school was located near Tchoupitoulas Avenue and that Loretto said, "When you know how to spell it, it's time to be missioned." Sister Loretto also used to say that "if a horse died on the street, the policeman pulled it around the corner because he couldn't spell it for "the police report."

One of her duties was the choir, which she would prepare to sing at the first masses of many Vincentian priests. Sister Catherine Maher recalls that for these occasions Sister Loretto had a favorite psalm (Psalm 116), "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord." Though Father Manuel Pelleteri of DePaul University, Chicago, was only in the second grade at the time, he remembers the generosity of Sister Loretto in directing the choir and the Christmas play.

Sister Loretto sent eight boys to the Vincentian seminary. Two left the community, one died young, and the remaining are Fathers George E. Dolan, Anthony Falanga, Ignatius Foley, and Harold and Warren Dicharry.

Father Warren Dicharry relates the following:

While Sister Loretto was a St. Stephen's school in New Orleans teaching seventh grade boys, I... was one of her students. On a certain day, "out of the blue" she asked me, "Warren, have you ever thought of being a priest?" I must honestly say that although I was an altar boy and had an older brother in the seminary, the thought had somehow never crossed my mind until then. Once she introduced it, however, it would not leave and, after struggling with it for a while, I finally had to tell her that, perhaps, I was being called to the priesthood after all. She was delighted and encouraged me to speak to my mother about it.

With some trepidation, I broached it with my mother, a widow with six children, whom she was trying to feed by dressmaking work. Her response came to me as no surprise. "Well, that's fine Warren, but how are you going to do it? In the midst of this depression (the year was 1932) we have no money for winter clothes or transportation to Cape Girardeau, Missouri (site of the Vincentian minor seminary some six hundred miles away!). Besides, you have a scholarship to Jesuit high school so that certainly seems the best place to go."

When I returned to Sister Loretto with this news, she never even blinked. "Don't worry about it," she reassured me. "I can talk to the Fathers about giving you a scholarship to the Cape and as for the clothes and transportation, I will ask Our Lord to take care of things. Every year on Good Friday, I always ask him for one favor and He always grants it, so I will make your needs my request this year."

Well, about a week or two after Easter, one of the other Daughters of Charity at St. Stephen's school, namely, Sister Margaret Mary Duffy, came into an inheritance and, at Sister Loretto's suggestion, defrayed all my expenses until my deacon year, when she died in Natchez, Mississippi, leaving \$175.00 in her deposit, which she left to me. It was just enough to provide a chalice which has the inscription: "Gaudium in caelo!" ("Joy in heaven") Luke:15.

Now as a Vincentian priest of forty-five years, I remember gratefully that woman of such faith and love, Sister Loretto Ryan, without whom I would probably never have become a priest in the first place.

In one of her retreats, Sister Loretto commented that "Father Anthony Falanga, a former pupil of mine, is giving the retreat. The rubrics are being carried out to perfection!" She loved to recall a Saint Stephen's spelling bee in which the usual prize-winning student was in the finals with Tony Falanga. Sister Loretto found herself secretly praying that Tony would win not only so she could bestow the prize on him but because she could picture the pride of his mother, Mrs. Falanga, who was a loyal friend throughout life. Tony did win.

An assistant at Saint Stephen's parish was Father John Cronin. He was impressed by Sister Loretto. Later, he was to be instrumental in her life when he became director of the Daughters in the Saint Louis province.

On 29 May 1926 Walter, her brother, finished Kenrick Seminary and was ordained to the priesthood. His assignment was in the diocese of Rockford, Illinois. Sister Loretto's prayers were answered: two of her brothers became priests.

During her years at Saint Stephen's, Sister Loretto finished high school and began summer school for a bachelor's degree in English which she received from Loyola University of the South in July 1932. In the summer of 1933 she was completing her thesis for a master's degree in English. The thesis, "The Ethical Element in Shakespeare Illustrated in Macbeth," contains a statement on human nature that gives an insight into Sister Loretto's life:

What is it that makes Shakespeare's name stand out so prominently as a supreme master? It is in the manner in which he deals with his characters. Other writers acquaint us with the exterior actions of their creations and from their exterior, we are left to judge of the interior; but Shakespeare goes from the heart out. He seems to get within his characters to manifest the secret conflicts of their souls, of which the exterior actions are merely a manifestation. Shakespeare is a master of the human heart.

Puerto Rico

The thesis was never submitted because Sister Loretto had to forgo completing her degree to become sister servant of Immaculate Conception Academy of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, in August 1933. Sister Regina Henley relates that there she met Sister Loretto for the first time at an annual retreat. The two discovered they were both from Chicago and had gone to Saint Patrick's school.

Mrs. María Paredes de Schmer, a former student of the academy, recalls that Sister Loretto counseled her during the hard time when her parents were getting divorced. She remembers: "Through Sister Loretto, I was able to bring up my sister, Gracia, and my brother, Antonio, to study at Immaculate Conception. She clothed me many times, always doing it in a way that I did not realize it was charity. She guided me to do the best for other people. 'It is never enough,' she would tell me. I learned from her how much one can do for other people in life and she was right, It is never enough!"

In one of her writings, Sister Loretto reminisced that on a trip to the Pacific Rim, a place reminded her of Puerto Rico where the real poor of the *campos* lived. In both the people seemed desperately poor.

Seminary Directress

In 1940 Sister Loretto was missioned to be seminary directress. She left Puerto Rico for a duty that was to be difficult for her. Arriving at Marillac Seminary on 25 August, she said that after she saw what the duties of the directress included, she decided to have a mass said for her intentions; however, after a week, she made it "a novena of masses." For twelve years Sister Loretto stayed in the seminary. Many Sisters were to be influenced by her during these years.

Sister Loretto brought the human dimension to the seminary where the sisters received the grounding for their spiritual life. Though ascetism was the ultimate goal, Sister Loretto had an uncanny way of illustrating human beginnings with unforgettable one-liners that stayed in the memories of the sisters long after the seminary. The mothering and nurturing of her six brothers seemed to have made her attentive to the needs of others, at this period of time hundreds of young sisters.

Sister Rita Zimmerman commented that she was nine months in the seminary when Sister Loretto was made directress. "I was much impressed with Sister Loretto's lovely, calm, tranquil manner and way of dealing with me. ... She followed 'her Lambs' through their lives as

religious women and one knew that she was always 'there' to help in time of difficulty."

Sister Mary Junkin comments that the axiom she heard most from Sister Loretto in the strict time of pre-Vatican II was "live and let live!" Sister Mary shares the following memory of the seminary:

We were rather a large seminary group. Sister Loretto was our Directress. Though she had her own private room, she chose to share the rows of beds occupied by the Sisters. Her little alarm clock was set each night as she slipped into her alcove.

Promptly at 4:00 A.M., it would sound and Sister Loretto would proclaim: "In the name of God, my sisters, rise, if you please." And some twenty voices would respond, "May the Holy name of God be blessed." We would all struggle into our rather complicated clothing and stumble to the big chapel in the moonlight.

Well, as the way of the world would have it, on one occasion, the alarm failed: I think it is the only time I can remember that Sister Loretto lost her cool. "For God's sake, Sisters," she shouted, "Get up! It's late!" and, of course, we did. And it was.

Sister Loretto Kearney recalls that she "had a special interest in our families. She had a special trait of making each of us, especially those of us who need it most, feel 'special' to her." Sister Mary Ellen Creedon remarks: "I really do credit Sister Loretto for getting me started in the direction that I did. I was interested in being a nurse and she was the one who made it possible."

Sister Loretto could strike fear into a few sisters entering the seminary. Sister Mary Dupont recounts: "When I was in the Seminary, she often told me to 'be a woman.' When I had my visit with her, she told me, I looked 'scared to death!' ... To be truthful, I really was!"

Sister Daniel Hannefin captures some unusual stories about Sister Loretto in the happenings of the Seminary:

She was my Directress and I was scared to death of her. She had a droll humor that I found a bit threatening. There was one little Sister who was standing in the hall crying, and Sister Loretto said, "Sister, just don't stand there. If you don't know what to do, grab a mop and use it!" Sister Loretto came back a few minutes later and saw the Sister. This time, the Sister was bawling and mopping the floor. Sister Loretto said, "Sister, we dry mop the floors!"

The spiritual reading at two o'clock included an incident where a Sister was given a collar that didn't fit her. Rather than complain about the clothing, she used a safety pin to close it in the front. Of course, she got into trouble for using the pin, but the interim Directress, while Sister Loretto was away, praised the virtue of this Sister during her instruction because the Sister did not complain about what was given her for her use. The next

day, Sister Loretto came home. The Reader forgot to turn the page and the incident was read again. Sister Loretto started her instruction with "The woman didn't have good sense. ... She should have simply said, 'The collar didn't fit! Give me one that does.'" We all had a good laugh.

We had quite a few funerals while I was in the Seminary. On one occasion, two Sisters died within two days of each other. It was decided to have the funerals together. Now, we had been to several funerals in that month. It was very cold. Sister Loretto said, "Tomorrow, we're going to have a 'doubleheader' so we won't get cold as often." Later on, she apologized for her irreverence. We didn't find it irreverent, but it was a great example of her humility.

Sometimes, living the life of virtue in the Seminary can be "confusing," as Sister Mary Rose Kohn, missioned in Zaire, relates:

Those of us who were privileged to have Sister Loretto for Seminary Directress had a unique relationship with her. Early in the Seminary, Sister Loretto seemed to sense when not to make things too hard. I must admit I had a hard seminary and cried often secretly.

I learned so many beautiful lessons from Sister Loretto during my many years of contact with her. She expected you to act like a woman. She could not tolerate self-pity and self-indulgence. She would say: "You don't come to the community to be 'languishing ladies.'" "Wear out, don't rust out." Another of her repeated sayings was "Don't wear your heart on your sleeves." Sister Directress helped countless Daughters of Charity, and I am glad that I had her for my Directress.

Family-wise, Sister Loretto knew joys and sorrows. Marie, Harry, Tim, and her twin, John, had all married. Harry and John had four children; Tim and Marie had five. Sister Loretto, though not able to make home visits, enjoyed the correspondence and Christmas packages of her nieces and nephews. Her priest brother, Packey, was assistant to Bishop Edmund Hoban and worked in the chancery office. Later, he was the founding pastor of Queen of All Saints parish, Oak Park, Illinois. Walter, in the Rockford diocese, was pastor of Saint Patrick's church, Saint Charles, Illinois. In 1946 Sister Loretto's father died quietly at home. In obedience to community policy, she did not go home for the funeral.

In the 1940s and 1950s there were large numbers of women who felt called to be Daughters of Charity. Professional services to assist them in these years of formation were not available, particularly if the young sisters experienced difficulty or were indecisive in continuing formation. Sister Loretto had a way of dealing with this, captured by Sister Kathleen Grimley:

Sister Loretto was a legend before I ever met her, which was in 1947. I probably expected to face someone straight-laced and sober when I went to the Seminary on that mid-November morning. Those blue eyes and that broad smile completely contradicted my expectations. I liked her from the start. As I was able to observe her during the Seminary, catch her marvelous sense of humor, see a living exemplification of St. Vincent's teachings and appreciate her delicate charity in her dealings with the Sisters. I came to love her very dearly.

Sister Loretto's spirit of faith, especially in the power of prayer was extraordinary. One example was her asking God to send a Sister to the Seminary by the name of "Hogan." I believed she asked it of God as a sign of something. Unbelievably, two Hogan girls made application. Everybody knows of her devotion to Saint Michael and how the red vigil light signaled that she was praying for a special intention.

The red vigil light in front of Saint Michael signaled the journey of many into different life styles. One Sister who was delayed in getting the habit commented on working this through with Sister Loretto: "For some reason, I didn't get the habit. ... There were others involved who didn't think I could make the grade. I do believe in Divine Providence and I feel like God had a part in all these things. As I got less sensitive, I could be more appreciative of her role in my life."

Another quality that Sister Loretto had was her concern for the families of the seminary sisters. Sister Loretto Gettemeier comments:

Sister Loretto was far ahead of her time in humanizing community life. Frequently, she would tell us to keep the spirit, not the letter of the law. She wasn't above a little "conniving" to give pleasure, not just to the Sister, but mainly to her family.

Sister Loretto had a genuine interest in each Sister's family. Years after she had a Sister in the Seminary, she would recall names of brothers and sisters and ask the Sisters about them.

She got to know well the mothers of the Sisters from the St. Louis area. She kept in contact with them both by phone and by visit ... Sister Caroline Collins, Visitatrix, called Sister Loretto's group of mothers, her "Mothers Club." They were incredibly loyal to her, and she to them.

Sister Josephine Oldani tells how, in moments of crisis, Sister Loretto was there, bringing presence and support. Sister Josephine's Jesuit priest brother had a brain tumor removed and during his time of immediate recuperation, Sister Loretto was there to visit him, saying the Hail Mary. Though his head was heavily bandaged, she had him, somewhat dazedly, sign a card "to send to his mother."

Many sisters mentioned the profound influence Sister Loretto had on their lives. Sister Julfanna Beuerlein talks of the history between

herself and Sister Loretto: "I knew Sister Loretto for forty years because Sister was Directress of the Seminary. ... Sister influenced my life perhaps more than any other person I have ever known. She took a special interest in each one of us throughout our entire life." Sister Mary John Lindner reflects:

Sister Loretto is integral to my history of salvation. I first met her when I entered the Seminary. ... How she lived the scriptural directive, "The gift you have received, give as a gift." Sister's devotion to our Lady was deep and continuing. ... How many rosary novenas she made, only the good Lord knows.

Her sense of humor provided entertainment for many. She could recount one humorous incident after another. By reason of this gift, she enjoyed listening to others relating their experiences. A saving factor was this gift in terms of Sister's ability to see the incongruous in persons and in events. She was joyful without being unduly light, serious without being grave. She possessed a common sense that gave her a certain simplicity.

Between 1951 and 1952 Sister Loretto was to lose, through death, two central persons in her life. The first was her brother, Packey who died suddenly of a heart attack on 10 January 1951. He was pastor at Ascension parish, Oak Park, Illinois. Sister Caroline Collins, visitatrix, asked Sister Loretto to accompany Sister Catherine Sullivan, then assistant, to a meeting in Chicago, and for the first time Sister Loretto was able to attend the funeral of a family member. The following year, in 1952, Sister Caroline Collins, her close friend, died. Her grief was to be somewhat set aside because she was made "sister assistant" to Sister Catherine Sullivan, the new visitatrix. In this period, Sister Loretto was affectionately called the "D.A." (directress-assistant).

In one of her last conferences to the seminary sisters, Sister Loretto said: "We should leave the retreat with a firm conviction of the love of God and be in a frame of mind to accept the trials and crosses He may send us. We should refill our spiritual bank so we will have something to help us in the trials which come before our next retreat." Indeed, that year, Sister Loretto had known trials.

Sister Assistant

The challenge of this period was to bring balance to the lives of so many Sisters. The 1950s saw the greatest growth of vocations; at one point in 1956 there were ninety-nine Sisters in the Seminary. These Sisters then stayed at Marillac for their college days. Not all were meant for the academic life, and Sister Loretto endeavored to make Marillac a

home for many who found the intellectual and spiritual life strenuous. She had an office opposite the mail room. Sister Margaret Quinn ponders the "long lines of Sisters outside her door":

So many things will be written about Sister Loretto Ryan! She was so personally involved with so many sisters – even the most ordinary ones. She lived through with us the terror of those first days of the Seminary, and in some ways, contributed to them!

Nevertheless, in the quiet of her office, when no one was present, she could be very supportive and caring. It seemed to me, even in my youth, that Sister tried to make people believe that she was very strict with the young Sisters and was not a very feeling person, but the long lines of Sisters outside her door attested to the fact that most saw beyond this exterior. I always wondered why so many had problems to discuss with her and I couldn't come up with a reason serious enough to have to get in that line. Returning to Marillac to go to school meant living in a large house. ... Sister was our Sister Servant and made it "home" for us. Usually, there was candy behind her door and a chance to tell her about the day when we got home.

Sister Loretto had an unusual capacity to discern justice in a situation. She seemed able to keep perspective on happenings and, whether it be a sister servant or one of her subjects, she would concentrate on the issue of the moment with titles holding little meaning. Sister Loretto Gettemier comments: "If Sister Loretto ever thought that a Sister Servant was unduly hard or not understanding of one of her 'lambs,' she went to bat for the Sister and the Sister Servant had to answer to Sister Loretto."

Sister Agnes Brodhage commented: "I looked upon Sister Loretto as a loved relative who really cared about me and what happened to me. She had the unusual ability to accurately size a person up within a short period of time. She read character well. She was tough, but I wouldn't want it any other way because I am stronger for it."

Sister Shirley Hellmann pointed out that "she was a great correspondent; she wrote to everyone who wrote to her." Sister Josita Parrino commented on Sister Loretto's concerns and sacrifices for others: "I remember once when a Sister was considering leaving the community. Sister Loretto thought she had a vocation. This was in the heat of the summer months, and I recall Sister Loretto was sleeping without a fan so that the Sister might stay. The Sister did stay. Sister Loretto never asked anything of you unless she herself had already demanded it of herself. She had a funny dry wit ... always ready to encourage, listen and talk with you. She was supportive."

In 1954 four sisters were sent to Japan to work in the missions. Sister Loretto encouraged them during this time, particularly Sister Mary Patrick Collins, one of her first seminary sisters. Sister Loretto was to take a great interest in the foreign missions as Sister Assistant. That year also marked the Marian Congress that brought the community together at Marillac to honor the Blessed Mother, a memorable moment in Marillac history.

In 1956 I, her niece, entered the seminary. Having been named after Sister Loretto, I found her caught between having an interest in how I was doing and not showing partiality. She came only once to visit me in the seminary and that was on Pentecost. Somehow, I knew she was with me in prayer, but it was difficult. I expressed to her in this visit that mortification could make for a two-way street. One effect that my coming to the community had on Sister Loretto was closer ties with her own family as we would share family visits. For Sister Loretto, it was getting to know her nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, something she seemed to enjoy. Her sense of humor and unpredictability kept us all wondering; I remember visits at Marillac as being short, but full of spontaneity and laughter.

During the days when Marillac College was in existence, Sister Loretto was to influence the young sisters who came to study during the summer sessions. Her two o'clock conferences were filled with practical wisdom. Sister Catherine Madigan remarks: "In telling us a story from the Bible, Sister would make an allusion to our life. She said once, 'To dig, I am not able; to beg, I am ashamed; I know what I will do, I will be a Daughter of Charity.' Another time in exhorting the Sisters about their behavior on returning to their missions after summer school, she said: 'Sisters, when the Daughters of Charity take a train ride to New Orleans, they have only one meal. It begins when they get on the train and it ends when they are ready to get off.' None of us missed the message!"

Sister Loretto Gettemier, reflecting on the two o'clock conferences, comments: "We looked forward to them for we knew we'd get 'homemade bread,' but it would be sprinkled with a good bit of Irish humor. Some of her favorite sayings to us were: 'Nothing is as sad as a sad saint.' 'Get that God-help-me look off your face!'"

spoke Spanish to Sister Loretto. Observing this, Mother Lepicard then began to discuss matters with Sister Loretto in Spanish! When the travellers arrived at Marillac, Mother Lepicard still expressed high energy and spirit; however, a rather tired Sister Catherine and Sister Loretto followed her.

Sister Honora Remes shares her memories of Sister Loretto: "When we were going to summer school in the Juniorate, Sister Loretto would give us talks in the afternoon. I can remember being very impressed by the practicality and solidity of her spiritual life. She seemed to me, at that time, a woman who had a lot of common sense and a deep love of Our Lord. She spoke from experience and I needed that at the time. She was like a spring of fresh water in the middle of summer. I want to convey that she helped me at a time when there seemed to be so little reality to the life that I was experiencing."

In 1965 Sister Loretto considered retirement from her duty as assistant in the province. Sister Mary Rose McPhee was the new visitatrix. On 15 August 1965 Mother Suzanne Guilleman wrote Sister Loretto that her request for retirement had been accepted:

Many are the Sisters whose vocations you have strengthened by your example and charity. These indeed are living monuments of your service of God. Only too well can I understand the pain you feel in leaving your loved Marillac after spending twenty-five years there, first as Directress of the Sisters from 1940 to 1952 and thereafter as Provincial Assistant. This is your Silver Jubilee of living in your Provincial house and your Crucified Spouse asks you to share more intimately His heavy cross. Your renewed gift of self will bring countless blessings upon the province and upon us, when we seek to do His Holy Will, especially at the cost of great sacrifice, He Himself changes the sacrifice to joy, because He increases within us and His Love is our happiness.

Here, in our privileged Chapel, our Blessed Mother appeared again and again. This maternal heart loves you for the complete dedication of your life to her dear Son. Tell her all your difficulties, your thoughts, your joys. She understands. She, too, has suffered. With the Most Holy Virgin and her Son, you need never be lonely. ...

Mount Saint Joseph's Home, San Francisco

Leaving her loved Marillac was difficult for Sister Loretto. On 9 September 1965 she arrived in California. Sister Loretto writes: "God bless Sister Yvonne Thranow who has done everything possible to make me feel wanted or needed! ... On the mission here, there are fifteen Sisters and over one hundred girls from the ages of six to eighteen. Many seek something of which they are deprived, namely, a mother's love." Sister Loretto found it quite difficult and when Sister Mary Rose,

visitatrix, would call her, she "could not refrain from shedding a few tears. Everyone is lovely here, but the change after 25 years at Marillac is tremendous. I have to stiffen my backbone."

During this year Sister Loretto was also to celebrate her golden jubilee. At this time the division of the provinces was in process. On 17 March 1968 Sister Loretto was missioned to Saint Louise de Marillac school "to work with Mrs. Gettemeier with the shut-in retreats."

Saint Louise de Marillac School, Saint Louis, Missouri

Sister Mary Virginia Clark was sister servant of the Saint Louise community. Sister Loretto helped tutor children. At this time I was in Kentucky and was inspired to volunteer to serve 5,000 lepers in 113° heat in Thailand. What I omitted to note were the ten prerequisite qualities in the letter of request, such as maturity, obedience and mortification, which sister visitatrix and the council were looking for in the Thailand missionaries. After requesting to go there, I wrote to Sister Loretto. She replied, "I was just saying to the Sisters in the community, 'what idiot thinks she has all these qualities?' when your letter arrived."

Missions in Chicago, Illinois

On 25 January 1969 Sister Elise Boudreaux, visitatrix of the East Central Province, asked Sister Loretto to come to Chicago to be sister servant in the closing of Saint Patrick's school. This was a difficult time for the community. Sister Loretto, though, had the joy of knowing more intimately her own family, including her grandnieces and nephews. Every Saturday her brother, Tim, held the weekly Ryan breakfast club on Byron Street. Sister Loretto went out each Saturday morning to "visit the Poor" and returned with several coffee cakes.

Two other outings that Sister Loretto permitted herself in Chicago included Lutz's Bakery with Vienna coffee or the Buffalo Soda parlor for a butterscotch sundae. When I came home for my visit after a Welfare Walk for the Appalachian Poor in Kentucky, Sister Loretto commented to me that it disturbed her that the "Ryans think that I'm the conservative and you are the liberal and it isn't true." When I questioned her about what was the truth, she replied, "You see, I'm the liberal, but you are the radical!" Comeback lines did not come easily to Sister Loretto but this situation deserved it, so I pointed out to her that in my opinion, she was far more radical in her time than I was in mine.

She pondered a moment and replied, "Yes, but I was quieter about it." In June 1970 Sister Loretto attended the last commencement exercise from Saint Patrick's high school.

"Well, old Saint Patrick's has closed its doors. I'm going to Saint Joseph's hospital after the closing to visit patients." In August 1970 Sister Loretto was missioned to Saint Joseph Hospital as patient visitor. She saw her duty in practical terms: "After talking to Margaret, her niece, as is my Sunday custom, I made out my time sheet for two weeks. I worked 88 hours at the rate of \$2.50 or \$2.75 per hour. That isn't too bad for an old gal. [Sister Loretto was 76 years old at the time.] I believe the pay is raised every so often. Be that as it may, I find great pleasure in the work, thank God."

Weekly, Sister Loretto's nieces, Maureen Dondanville and Margaret Hoyt, drove her to visit Walter. Maureen's children, Teddy and Julie, would accompany them. During one car ride, Sister Loretto brought out her rosary. Julie, then about four years old, tapped Sister Loretto on the shoulder and said, "I don't like that story; it never ends!"

Her good friend, Sister Andrea Vaughan, invited Sister Loretto to semi-retire at Saint Vincent's house on 18 August 1975. Sister Andrea recalls: "Sister Loretto was my personification of a Daughter of Charity. She saved so many vocations. She was a woman of faith with an intense prayer life and dependence on Divine Providence. She was my friend throughout the years. She so exemplified the life of a Daughter of Charity, particularly in her last years, because she was stripped of everything." Sister Margaret Pohlhelber worked with Sister Loretto at the Lincoln Park Senior Citizen center. "The aged loved her. She would not tolerate gossip, dissension, or complaining of aches and pains. She was an example to them of one who was seasoned in age and wisdom." However, Sister Loretto's health was failing and her main concern was her eyesight. Slowly, her vision was leaving her. She asked for retirement.

Seton Manor, Evansville, Indiana

On 14 January 1977 Sister Loretto retired to Seton Manor. Her duty as telephone receptionist kept her in the hub of activities there. Her sister servant writes that Sister Loretto lived the life she spoke of during her talks to the seminary sisters. She learned to use the loom; creating stoles for priests was to be her last work and duty. The loom did not require as much vision as kinesthetic ability.

In May 1980 she wrote to me: "Being unable to read any of the songs of their retreat, I am sending them to you. I am almost inclined to believe that this is my last retreat."

In November 1980 Sister Loretto suffered a stroke. She did not regain the use of her right arm and leg. Her eyesight was extremely poor and she experienced mental confusion. During these days, Sister Loretto would often call for "Nanna," her beloved Aunt Nan, who was such a comfort to her.

Sister Rosalind England, sister servant at Seton Manor during Sister Loretto's illness, thoughtfully reflects: "In November 1980, when Sister Loretto suffered a stroke, it was difficult. Since she was a very spiritual person and living in close union with our Lord, God spared her this trial by granting her the ability to selectively choose to live in her past where experiences were more pleasant and tolerable. Although these days were painful for others, they allowed Sister Loretto to live with dignity and peace."

When Sister Loretto entered the dying process, it was to last for a week. I stayed with her in the first days. One evening, I went to the bed as her eyes seemed open. I repeated the names of her mother and father, Aunt Nan, and each of her brothers, saying they were waiting for her as she would be with them. She struggled to say something and when I bent down to understand, one word emerged, "When?" "Soon, Sister Loretto, soon."

"Sister Loretto clung to her life, awaiting the Providential Moment. It came while over a hundred Sisters -- most of whom knew Sister Loretto -- were assembled at Seton Manor for the Corporation meeting." On the morning of the first day, 16 October 1981, Father Carl Schulte, C.M., director, arrived at 8:00 A.M. when Sister Loretto was in her dying moments. As Father invoked the intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, and with Sister Andrea holding her hand, Sister Loretto went home to her Beloved Lord whom she had served so faithfully.

That evening, a prayer service included the reflections of many of the Daughters of Charity about Sister Loretto's life. Though expressing sadness at her death, the reflections of the sisters seemed to celebrate that Sister Loretto now experienced the redemptive life. The words of her beloved Saint Paul capture it well: "She has run the race well; now, there is laid up for her, the heavenly prize" (2 Timothy 4:7).