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Sister M. Armella Billian

Saint Mary's School, Columbus, Ohio was accepted by our Congregation in April, 1875. This was the only school we had in the Columbus diocese until August, 1922 when at the request of Bishop Hartley of Columbus, we took charge of Immaculate Conception School, which opened in September, 1922.

In the sixty-three years since our coming to the diocese, no Sister of our Community had died in Columbus. This long record was broken in January 14, 1937 when Sister Armella Billian died at Saint Francis Hospital, Columbus. In 1922 when the Immaculate Conception Mission was opened, Sister Armella had been appointed for the domestic work. She remained there until her death.

Sister Armella took a cold a few days after the new year. She made nothing of it. In fact, her concern was about the other Sisters in the convent who had colds and she was doctoring them. On January 7, however, her own cold got the better of her and she was obliged to go to bed. The next day her condition was worse so the doctor was called. On January 9 her condition seemed somewhat improved but on Sunday afternoon, January 10, her condition had become so bad that the doctor ordered her to be taken to the hospital. He diagnosed her case as flu-pneumonia. That same evening her condition was so serious that it was thought she would not live through the night. She had received the last sacraments. Sister Liboria, the Superior, called Joliet by telephone and Sister Faustina notified Rev. Mother Thomasine who was in Chicago conducting the canonical visitation. A second message reported that Sister was improving, but on Tuesday evening another telephone message informed Reverend Mother Thomasine that Sister Armella was sinking fast. Mother Thomasine arranged to travel that night taking Sister Edith as a companion. When they reached the hospital the next morning, Sister Armella was conscious, recognized both and spoke to them. They left the hospital soon afterward, but when they returned after ten o'clock, Sister no longer gave any sign of recognition. She remained in that same condition all day, and in spite of the little hope that the nurses gave for her recovery, Mother Thomasine entertained hopes that she might pull through since she had not succumbed so far. She arranged that she and Sister Edith would remain with Sister Armella during the night. Sister Alphonse, her sister, and a member of the Sisters at Rochester, with another married sister, remained with her during the afternoon and early evening. They had come when word was sent to them of Sister's serious illness.

During the first hours of the night, though apparently unconscious, Sister was most restless. The very high fever made her delirious. After eleven o'clock she became more quiet, but her breathing was very heavy.

The nurses and Sisters on duty came in from time to time during the night. About two o'clock in the morning one of the Sisters told Reverend Mother that Sister Armella's temperature was over 107 degrees, and that she would possibly live another hour or so. Mother Thomasine led the dying prayers. About three o'clock the chaplain of the hospital came in to say the prayers for the dying and to give her absolution. Hour after hour passed and still no change was evident. When the clock struck seven in the morning there was still no change visible either in the breathing or on her countenance. In a moment or so after however, the heavy breathing ceased abruptly, a pallor passed over her countenance and before five minutes after seven dear little Sister Armella was no more. Only Mother Thomasine and Sister Edith were with her when she died. The Sisters and nurses were at Mass.

Arrangements were made to have Sister buried from the Immaculate Church Columbus, Ohio. Father Fagan, the pastor, arranged for all the details of the services. Mother Thomasine interviewed Bishop Hartley in regard to purchasing a plot at the cemetery. His Excellency commissioned one of the priests to arrange with the undertakers, Ryan and Egan, to take care of the grave for Sister's burial. It was found out later that a large plot in St. Joseph Cemetery has been set aside for the burial place of the Sisters of the different Communities.

Father Fagan showed most kind thoughtfulness in arranging for the funeral Mass which was celebrated at nine o'clock January 16. Father Fagan was celebrant. The Rev. Walter Minder of Corpus Christi Church was deacon, the Reverend Richard Crosser, chaplain of Our Lady of Mercy, Granville, was Master of Ceremonies, the Rev. Raymond Bauschard, pastor of St. Mary Magdalene was subdeacon. After the absolution the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edmund Burkley, pastor of St. Mary's Church preached a touching sermon. He took for his text the words so familiar to every Sister: "Veni, Sponsa Christi," explaining how Sister had died fifty years ago to the world when she consecrated her life to her heavenly Spouse. The world with its pleasures and interests meant nothing to her and now she had the joy of hearing her Spouse say, "Come - Veni."

All the Sisters from our houses in Columbus and several Sisters from Our Lady of Mercy, Granville, attended the funeral Mass and accompanied the remains to the cemetery. Sisters from several other Communities also attended the Mass.

The remains were laid to rest in St. Joseph Cemetery, Columbus, in a grave facing the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. The Rev. John Fagan recited the prayers at the grave.