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Sister M. Mercedes Vollmer

The sudden death of Sister M. Mercedes Vollmer, Director of School Supervision and Former Vicareess, at 9:30 this morning, Friday, November 13, at the Motherhouse was a great shock and caused deep grief to the Community.

Sister had for the past week not been feeling well, but had continued in her ordinary routine. As late as Wednesday evening she went to the Dames Funeral Home to pay her last respects to the deceased Pius Fahrner and led the prayers the Sisters recited for him.

Sister had for years been subject to heart attacks. She was under the care of Dr. Arthur Fahrner, who called on Monday to check her condition. He prescribed a new medicine, but did not insist upon her remaining in bed. The Sisters tried to persuade her to do this, but without success. On Thursday morning she should not have risen, but protested, "With the Lord so near, I cannot stay in bed." On Friday morning, however, she did stay. After Mass she admitted to Sister Mary of the Angels how miserable she felt, adding, "I don't think I'm going to make it this time," nor was she convinced that with rest and care she would really ^{ago}again.

Later Sister Consolata brought her breakfast, but she had no appetite and asked only for her medicine. This seemed to relieve her, and soon she was talking with something of her usual bringt manner. To Sister Consolata's urging about breakfast Sister Mercedes now replied she would take some lemonade, and Sister left to prepare it. When she returned about ten minutes later she found Sister had passed away.

Father Gervase and the Doctor were called immediately. Father arrived in just a few minutes and gave Sister absolution and Extreme Unction. Dr. Fahrner called a bit later, pronouncing the cause of her death acute cardiac dilation. Sister was seventy years of age and had been in religion fifty-four years. She had entered the convent Agnes Vollmer from Sigel, Illinois.

The announcement of Sister's death everywhere brought regret and grief. She had for so long been part of the Community's consciousness and had seemed to be so vibrant and alive to friends both within and outside the Community that it was difficult for all of them to accept the unexpected news. The Sisters from all outlying missions came in over the weekend to view the corpse, and many Jolietans called to pay their last respects.

Funeral services were held in the Motherhouse chapel on Monday, November 16th at 8:15. The Office of the Dead was recited in Community preceding the Mass. His Excellency the Most Rev. Martin D. McNamara presided at the Solemn Requiem Mass and gave the last Absolution. Rev. Gervase Brinkman, OFM, chaplain of the Convent, was celebrant. He was assisted by Rev. Fred Barthelme, pastor of St. Timothy Church, Maple Lake, Minnesota, a former pupil of Sister Mercedes, as deacon, and by Rev. Arduin Hiller, OFM, as subdeacon. Assistant priest was the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edwin V. Hoover of St. Raymond Cathedral, and assistants at the throne were Rev. Lucien T. Casey, O. Carm., principal of Joliet Catholic High School, and Rev. Gordon Michels, pastor of St. Paul the Apostle, Joliet. Master of ceremonies was Rev. Thomas B. O'Keefe.

Present in the sanctuary were the Rt. Rev. Msgr. George Wunder, Sacred Heart, Englewood; Rt. Rev. Msgr. George P. Heimsath, St. Pascal's, Chicago; Rev. Alphonse Coan, OFM, Rev. Philip Koehler, OFM, St. John, Joliet; Rev. E. O. Leiser, St. Clement, Chicago; Rev. Francis Bellerive, St. Ann, Lansing; Rev. J. F. Nellis, St. Joseph, Manhattan; Rev. Francis Blum, O. Carm., St. Bernard, Joliet; Rev. Wilfred Cool, OFM, College Chaplain; and Rev. John Then, chaplain at Guardian Angel Home.

Burial was made at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, Joliet, Rev. Barthelme officiated at the grave, assisted by Father Gervase, Father Philip, Father Francis, Father Leiser, and Father Bellerive.

Sister Mercedes had with distinction served her Community for fifty-three years. She began her teaching career in 1900 at St. John the Baptist, Joliet. Following that, she she spent nine years at St. Boniface, Chicago, and seven years at St. Mary, Columbus. She was the first principal of St. Raymond School, Joliet, which opened in 1918, and remained there six years. In 1931 Sister was named principal of St. Francis Academy, and continued to head this school until 1935.

Sister also served many years as administrator in the Community. In 1925 she was named community school supervisor, holding the position for five years. From 1935 to 1944 she again served in that capacity. From 1944 on, she was director of school supervision. She served as Councillor consecutively for twenty-seven years, from 1926 until the time of her death; six years of this span saw her also Vicarress.

As Sister's influence had been widely felt, so now her passing was widely mourned, and many tributes were paid her. Rt. Rev. Msgr. D. F. Cunningham, Archdiocesan Superintendent of Schools, wrote, "The schools of the Archdiocese of Chicago are deeply in the debt of Sister Mercedes. She has merited a high place in heaven for the splendid work which she accomplished for thousands of our Catholic children. Personally, I shall be eternally grateful for the assistance she always gave me in the work of administering the schools of the Archdiocese."

Very Rev. Msgr. Wagner, Diocesan Superintendent, stated, "She was always most kind and helpful to me in my problems with the schools and in the organization of the diocesan institutes each August."

Mother Evangela, Provincial Superior of the School Sisters Notre Dame, paid her the tribute, "Sister was so solid in her spirituality, so human, and yet so supernatural. May her noble soul....be now with God." And from Sister Dolores Schorsch: "For many a long year have I known Sister Mercedes and my admiration of her grew with the years. From those who knew her I ever heard of her intellectual forthrightness, sincerety and simplicity."

Miss Wanda Baron of Scott Foreman put it: "The school world has lost a very valuable far-seeing administrator and the teachers have lost an understanding and practical colleague."

Brother George Schuster, with the insight of a devoted friend and the touch of a poet, says; "I find myself wordless, numb at my typewriter. What can soldiers say when a Captain goes down? They can say nothing at all. Their silence is complusive, it is natural, it is good.

"But I feel that our Captain went down eagerly; it was the only avenue to up, where a gay-gallant ldy generals our valiant women...And Sister Mercedes joins all the angelic hosting. So we believe, so we know, so we must keep telling ourselves, or we forsake the fight for saddening."

And after reference to his 4 Sight books, he concludes, "And now she sees all ways in one way: a Beatific Epiphany! While the rest of us must stand yet a little while, knocking at the gate of Heaven, saying, 'Lord, that I may see!'"

The complete letter of Brother Schuster was sent by Reverend Mother Immaculate to the entire Community as a tribute the Sisters would greatly appreciate because they were so completely in accord with its sentiments.