

Death Of A Legend

By DOROTHY KUNZMAN
Times-Herald Writer

Sister Bertrand Fleming did not consider a 91st birthday anything to "make a big fuss about." Neither did she see it as an excuse to shirk her duties. She signed her contract for the 1984-85 school year, and was on the job every day through Monday of this week, working in the principal's office at St. Agnes Academy. She kept records, issued passes, and handled a myriad of minor details each day.



Her friends and associates felt the occasion should be celebrated, however, and they found several ways to do this despite her protests.

On the day itself, there was a decorated birthday cake and ice cream to be shared with her Sisters at the Marian Residence, and cards and gifts from friends and former students.

Just last week the St. Agnes Academy Foundation had announced that its fall fund drive would be dedicated to Sister Bertrand, in recognition of the thirty years she had spent working in the school. A plaque bearing the names of persons making gifts in her honor was to be presented to her at the conclusion of the drive.

Today is the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the Franciscan Sisters in Alliance. A Mass to celebrate the feast day was held in Holy Rosary Church this morning, and the students had decided that this would be an appropriate time to present their birthday gift. They prepared a check to the St. Agnes Academy Foundation in the amount of \$500, and a pledge to give another \$500 after their annual marathon dance.

On Tuesday morning Sister was sick and unable to go to school. Her illness did not seem

serious enough to warrant hospitalization, and by Wednesday evening she felt a little better. An alternate plan was devised — if she was not well enough to come to the celebration today, the students would go to her, serenade her and present their gift.

God had other plans for her. Sister Bertrand was uneasy about having a "fuss" made, and she was to be spared that trial.

The Sisters held a special prayer service Wednesday evening to commemorate the death of their patron, St. Francis. Shortly after the service was ended, Sister Bertrand collapsed, and died a few minutes later, as quietly as she had lived.

Even though she had spent a third of her life here, Sister was not widely known in the community. She was, however, a legendary figure to all associated with the parochial school. Former students who had gone away to college, or moved out of town, were sure to include a visit to "Sister Bertie" as a high priority item on their first visit home.

In accord with her vow of poverty, she had few possessions, but one that she treasured highly was the royal blue "Crusader jacket" she was given as a gift a few years ago. She wore it proudly over her religious habit, to school and to church and especially to St. Agnes athletic contests. Football seemed to be her favorite sport, and she was in the stands at nearly every home game, calling out support and advice to "her boys."

Few people could match her attendance record at school. In the 30 years she was there, she probably did not miss 30 days. She was well into her 80s when she slipped on ice during lunch hour one day and fractured her wrist. She missed the afternoon to have a cast put on the arm, but was back in school the next morning.

With the death of Sister Bertrand Fleming, St. Agnes Academy has lost a valued staff member, and many young people have lost a good friend. The birthday gifts will become memorial gifts, but the memory of this valiant lady will live on as long as her former students gather to share their favorite "Sister Bertrand stories."

The complete obituary appears on page ten.

Sr. M. Bertrand Fleming

Sister M. Bertrand Fleming, 91, died Wednesday evening at the Marian Residence, 1104 Toluca.

She was born Alice Frances Fleming, the daughter of James and Mary Maskell Fleming, in Helena, Mont. on June 8, 1893. She professed vows as a Sister of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity at Buffalo, New York on April 10, 1917.

She had served as a teacher in schools staffed by the order in Buffalo, N.Y.; Columbus, Ohio; St. Francis and Holy Rosary Indian Missions in South Dakota; and Rushville and at St. Agnes Academy in Alliance. She had also been administrator of St. Anthony's Hospital in O'Neill.

She had been an Alliance resident since Aug. 1, 1955.

Sister was a member of Holy Rosary Catholic Church, St. Agnes Home School Association, Legion of Mary, and had belonged to numerous school organizations through the years.

Funeral services will be held Saturday at 10 a.m. at Holy Rosary Church, with the Rev. Francis T. Curran officiating. Burial will be in Calvary Cemetery.

Bates-Landa Funeral Home is in charge of funeral arrangements.

Memorials may be sent to the St. Agnes Academy Foundation, 916 Cheyenne Ave., Alliance.

Sister Bertrand Fleming died on October 3, 1984.