

## MARIAN RESIDENCE

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Dear Sisters, Associates, Friends and Family Members,

It is difficult to say and mean "Come Sister Death" when we are so aware that our secret name is Life. At 104 years old, Sister Elma Vifquain did pray "Come Sister Death." When a Sister younger than she died Sister Elma would say that it really was her turn. Her turn finally came on November 9, 2005 at 10:15 p.m., the 85<sup>th</sup> year of her Religious Profession. Leadership, hospitality and prayer were innate qualities of her life. She seemed to have had them from the day of her birth, August 7, 1901. Her parents were Elmer Francis and Alma Teresa (Hamblet) Vifquain of Springview, Nebraska. In baptism she was called Josephine Cecilia and her Godparents said her first yes to God for her on this first step of her earthly journey.

Her High School days were spent at St. Mary's Academy, O'Neill, Nebraska. The Fall following her graduation in 1918 she entered the postulancy at Stella Niagara, New York. On her Reception Day, March 3, 1919, she received the name Sister Elma.

Many nieces and nephews survive who still call her Aunt Jo. She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers and six sisters. Faith is saying yes to God and she said yes to God again when she professed her first vows as a Sister of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity at Stella Niagara, New York on August 13, 1921. Three years later she professed final vows.

During her early years she taught school in New York State, Ohio, Colorado and in Nebraska. Some of her students still corresponded with her. Her cherished memories were of school days and her students. However, in 1945 her ministry changed and she said yes again when asked to serve as Administrator at St. Joseph's Hospital, Minot, North Dakota.

Probably the hardest yes for her was in 1951 when she was elected Provincial Minister of Sacred Heart Province, Denver, Colorado. For two terms (twelve years) she exercised leadership in the province compassionately, lovingly, consistently and prayerfully. She encouraged the Sisters to work for fulfillment in their vowed life and ministries. During her administration the building we know and love as Marycrest was built. Some of the facilities that opened during these years were: Marycrest Aspirant School for prospective candidates started in 1958 and was housed in Alliance, Nebraska in the former St. Joseph's School of Nursing now Marian Residence; Marycrest High School for girls in Denver, Colorado opened in 1954; St. Agnes School, Scottsbluff, Nebraska opened in 1955. She was the forerunner of the Tertianship Programs which began in 1961; Guardian Angels School, Denver, Colorado opened in 1962 and a new wing was erected for the Hospital in Minot, North Dakota. In addition to buildings, Sister Elma worked diligently to see to the further education of Sisters in their ministries realizing the need

for professional preparation but also provided opportunities for spiritual growth. During her administration she attended two General Chapters. The first one in Heythuysen, Netherlands in 1953 traveling by boat both ways. Her second one was in 1960, the first General Chapter in Rome to which she went by plane.

After her term as Provincial Minister she returned to St. Joseph's Hospital, Minot, North Dakota for another six years as Administrator. Many changes were happening in health care as well as in Religious Life following Vatican II. In 1966 under her direction lay people were asked to serve on the Hospital Governing Board. This necessitated a change in by-laws, etc.. The diploma school of nursing was discontinued to make clinical areas available for the four year program students at Minot State University. This action, too, required her skillful and tactful leadership.

She took the Council Documents seriously and at her invitation the three Religious communities (Benedictines, Franciscans and Ursulines) in Minot, North Dakota met and studied together the Documents of Vatican II. Dinner meetings for the employees were held to heighten their awareness of the Documents. As always her life and actions displayed her deep faith, her trust in God, and her love for the Church, the Franciscan Order and the Rosary.

After her retirement she spent a year at Queen of Peace Oratory, Denver, Colorado. Later she assumed charge of visitors at Marycrest, Denver, Colorado, where her innate hospitality was displayed.

When prayer and presence became her only ministry she lived at St. Clare Convent, Alliance, Nebraska before moving to Marian Residence, Alliance, Nebraska in 1990. During that time Sister Elma visited Minot, North Dakota on behalf of the Sisters of St. Francis Foundation and was given an honorary citizens award.

As the years went by Sister's eyesight and hearing diminished but not her interest in what was going on. Her questions, "Does (a visitor) have a place to stay, has she been invited to supper, etc. were always a concern for her. Always the question, "Why don't I die now?" And someone would lovingly (and sometimes impatiently) reply "because you would try to tell God how to manage heaven." During the last few weeks her condition gradually worsened and her tired body just gave up the fight for life.

The Mass of Christian Burial was held at 10:00 a.m. on November 14, 2005 at Marian Residence. Father Jim Heithoff, main celebrant, was assisted by Father Bryan Ernest who gave the homily, and by Fathers Gerald Harr and Stephen Deaver.

Sister became the 118<sup>th</sup> Sister to be buried in Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Alliance, Nebraska. May God of the living and the dead, who raised Jesus from the dead, raise Sister Elma and grant her new life.

The Sisters of Marian Residence