

Sister M. Antoinette Givens, D.M.

Note: Below is the eulogy read at Sr. Antoinette's funeral which took place on May 12, 2001.

Today we are here to say goodbye to our dear sister, relative, teacher, co-worker, friend. Whatever the case may be, all of us present here have known Sister Antoinette and in some way, perhaps in many ways, her life has touched ours and ours has touched hers.

A native of Millville, NJ, Sister Antoinette's association with our Sisters extends as far back as her grammar school days when she attended St. Mary Magdalene School in Millville and was taught by the Daughters of Mercy. Most of us didn't know her at that time but we have been told that she was a good student, a helpful and pious child, and somewhat of a "tom" boy!

Her high school years were spent right here with us at Our Lady of Mercy Academy where she was described as an avidly involved and very conscientious student. Sister Antoinette must have enjoyed and appreciated her years of schooling because we often heard her speak highly of her teachers and recount happy incidents from those days of her youth! We also heard that sometimes she would join in the school-day fun and give just a little bit of a "hard time" to those who taught her.

In response to God's special call, Sister Antoinette entered our Community in 1969. From that point on it didn't take her very long to discover that the genuine "love of her life," following as a close second to her religious vocation, was that of teaching young children. It seems almost certain to us that every moment of her many years spent in the classroom with the little ones brought her the greatest of joy.

As a principal in Notre Dame School, Newfield, and St. Philip School, Brigantine, she was always most conscientious and fulfilled her responsibilities thoroughly, and, most of the time, her dedication to work urged her to go even above and beyond the call of duty. Yet, even during these years, she always managed to include time in her busy

day to involve herself in teaching the little children, providing them with solid educational materials, and always seeking to help them to be successful in their studies.

We all know Sister Antoinette as a fine educator. Now, what can we say about Sister Antoinette as a person and as a religious? During these past few days as each of us reflected on her life and our relationship with her, most likely many adjectives and descriptive phrases came to our minds describing for each of us personally what she meant to us. Were we to gather together all these words and phrases about Sister Antoinette, they would certainly vary in content and would help to create a somewhat clear and precise picture of her as a person. Let it suffice to say that first of all, she was a genuinely good person and a committed woman religious who fulfilled her duties faithfully. Her life was rather uncluttered, and simple, but when it came to the organization she was at the top of the list far beyond what most of us would expect of one known to be among the most organized. A hard worker, she kept everything in perfect order -- and I really mean perfect -- in a straight line without any departure to the right or to the left. We can all testify to that!

Some would describe Sister Antoinette as a simple and prayerful person and others would mainly see her as a very determined and fiercely independent person. All of this being said, the testimony of her life showed a tenacious depth to her that clearly spoke of her strong relationship with her God. Without a doubt, it was this that gave her the unflinching strength to confront death squarely in the face with undaunted courage. Certainly, she must have experienced fears, especially in the face of the pain which little by little, would have overtaken her body and rob her of her freedom had she gone through the throes of the last stages of her illness. Mercifully, the Lord spared her from the final road of suffering which would have been hers if she had been delayed on this earth even a little while longer.

For many months Sister Antoinette had been preparing herself for her final days on this earth and was fully ready for the moment at which the Lord would call her to Himself.

Early on May 8, when the Lord did come, assuredly He gently summoned her with the words, "Well done good and faithful servant. Come now to the place which I have prepared for you from all eternity."

And so, because we here present still have both familiar and unknown paths to pursue on our earthly journey, we mourn the loss of our companion on the road. Yet, we rejoice in the testimony of her life well-lived and of her eternal reward well-earned.

Sister Antoinette, you have gone from us but, in our faith, we know that you will continue to be spiritually united with us. In your own words, you have assured us, "May you know my love for you and that I am waiting for you."

(Written by Sister Mary Grace, D.M.)