

Sister Francis Regis Dobiesz, OSF

Sister Francis Regis Dobiesz, OSF, of the Hospital Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis at Sacred Heart Hospital, went to the Lord on Sunday, August 3, in



Springfield, Illinois. Sister Francis was born Beatrice Dobiesz in Illinois on August 6, 1913, and moved with her family to a farm in the Thorp area when she was three years old.

As a very young girl, Sr. Francis felt an inner desire, a gentle longing to live a life like Jesus as



portrayed in the Scripture. She spent many years in service to the poor and the needy. As she approached her death at age 89, she continued to labor in the vineyard of Jesus.

It was during her childhood that Sister learned to value the needy and the poor. Her mother set the example for her daughter. Sister observed her mother giving neighbors some plants and flowers from the garden. Sister asked her mother why she gave the prettiest plants to others but kept the inferior ones for herself. Her mother's answer was "When you give something to someone, you give the best." This was a lesson that Sister never forgot and which guided her ministry for over 65 years. Sister began her work with the sick and the needy at the age of 16 while working at St. Joseph's hospital in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, cleaning patients' rooms. Here she observed the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis and was deeply impressed with their life style, prayer life, their service and interactions with others. She also studied the life of St. Francis of Assisi whose life was committed to helping the poor which resonated deeply within Sister Francis.

At the age of 23, Sister Francis made the decision to join the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis whose emphasis was on the care of the sick and the poor. She journeyed from Wisconsin to Springfield, Illinois, to enter the convent. Here she spent two



and a half years in religious formation, professed her religious vows in 1938, and assumed the name Sister Francis Regis.

The Sisters of St. Francis recognized Sister Francis' talent to serve God's people in a very special way. She was enrolled in St. John's School of Nursing in Springfield, Illinois and became a registered nurse in 1941. She was soon sent to DePaul University in Chicago where she obtained a bachelor's degree in chemistry in preparation for further study in medical technology and radiologic technology. Sister worked as a multi-skilled health practitioner, RN, medical technologist and x-ray technologist in the hospitals of St. Francis for the next 20 years.

In 1961, Sister was enrolled at the University of Minnesota where she earned a Master of Science degree with emphasis in immunology and blood banking. She later applied to the American Society of Clinical Pathologists for a Blood Bank Specialist Degree. Sister became the fourth person in the country to earn the Blood Bank Specialist designation. Sister acknowledged that her extensive education helped her to serve God and God's people more effectively.

In 1964, Sister returned to work in the hospital at St. Mary's Hospital in Streator, Illinois. In 1967, she suffered a heart attack and later was assigned to recover from her illness at Sacred Heart Convent in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. However, in 1968, another challenge was presented to Sister. She was called upon to establish Medical Laboratory training at Chippewa Valley Technical College.

In 1999, a one-year Certified Laboratory Assistant (CLA) program was established. Sister, always the futurist, quickly converted this program into an associate degree program for medical laboratory technicians. In a short time another challenge presented itself: How to establish an associate degree program in histotechnology. This was the first of its kind in Wisconsin and only one of seven like programs in the country. Sister remained at the Chippewa Valley Technical College until 1985, when she went into "retirement".

As a teacher, Sister excelled. She was a "master teacher". Her commitment to excellence and the welfare of the student was always a top priority. She shared herself fully with the students allowing them to believe that they had something very special to offer. She helped them to see that their own life experiences, their own insights and convictions and their own intuitions and ideas were worth

serious attention. She offered affirmation, encouragement and support rather than criticism. Providing food for those in need was not new to Sister.

Even while at the Technical College she recognized malnourished students whose education funds had expired. They had little money with which to purchase food. Sister provided food for them until they were able to manage for themselves.

Sister retired from education in 1985. This retirement was very short. One evening a family came to the St. Francis Convent asking for food. "We gave them food from our pantry and refrigerator." The word spread and more families came to the Sister's door.

Sister and her fellow Sisters began passing out food from the convent on a regular basis enlisting the help of a few lay volunteers. This marked the beginning of the St. Francis Food Pantry and once again Sister Francis was working full time for mankind. The St. Francis Food Pantry now serves 300 and more families per week who are in need of food and other assistance.

Sister remained active with the St. Francis Food Pantry up through her 89th year. Even during her valiant struggle with cancer, she remained active serving others until the Lord decided it was time to take her from this life and to her next stage in life in Heaven. Sister touched thousands of lives and will continue to do so.

She will be dearly missed by her family, friends and all who had the privilege of having had any contact with her. We all look forward to seeing her again in our "next life". Sister accepted her "new assignment" from God with exemplary faith and love.

Sister is survived by a sister, Frances Rygiel; a brother-in-law, Ed Rygiel of Tempe, Arizona; a sister, Harriet Smith of Austin, Minnesota; eight nieces and nephews; and countless numbers of friends. Services will be held on Wednesday with burial at St. Francis Cemetery, both in Springfield.

