

# **Sister M. St. Brigid, CSC**

(Hilda Margaret Bromeling)

September 1, 1916 – April 22, 2020

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Karla McKinnie, CSC, who read them at the memorial Mass on October 29, 2020.**

In 1963 a woman who knew Sister St. Brigid wrote that Sister was one of the most captivating persons with whom she had ever become acquainted. She described Sister as someone who put people at ease with her bubbling personality, a person with a sense of purpose and direction whose apostolate was to spread the faith as extensively as possible.

Born in 1916 in Woodlawn, Pennsylvania, to Joseph and Margaret Nievelt, Hilda was the youngest of eight children. Her parents were immigrants from Czechoslovakia. They moved to Detroit, Michigan, where her father worked for the Ford Motor Company. Hilda's mother died when Hilda was eight years old. Her father was unable to care for the younger children, so he put them in a home for adoption. Merton and Margaret Bromeling from Eaton Rapids, Michigan, adopted Hilda. They were well off so were able to give her a good education and anything she needed. Hilda missed her siblings, especially her sister Elizabeth.

Hilda met the Sisters of the Holy Cross when she attended Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. She was inspired by Sisters M. Madeleva (Wolff), CSC, Miriam Joseph (Rauh), CSC, and Maria Pieta (Scott), CSC. After graduation, she felt that the

convent would open the doors to a fuller and richer life for her. She entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1941 and was given the name Sister Mary St. Brigid after Mother Pauline (O'Neill), CSC, whose baptismal name was Bridget. She earned her master's degree in theology from Saint Mary's College in 1952.

It was interesting that during her 75 years of ministry in the Congregation, Sister St. Brigid felt called in three different directions: to be a contemplative sister, to be a missionary and to follow a vocation as a teacher. She was a prayerful person of deep faith who discerned these calls and accepted God's will wherever God sent her. In following her vocation as a Holy Cross sister, she was given the opportunity to be a contemplative, a missionary and a teacher. She spent 28 years as a teacher in classrooms in the Midwest and western United States as well as Brazil. Her love for children was demonstrated by her dedication and enthusiasm in the classroom. She also contributed to the formation of teachers, giving training in catechetics and methods. She had learned good methods from Sister M. Hildegardis (Gettier), CSC, who was well known in the Congregation for her techniques. Sister St. Brigid was usually part of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in her various missions.

It was noted that she developed a strong catechetical program during her five years in Brazil. She stated that most of the volunteer catechists did not have a good foundation in the faith. She taught them the basics of the Catholic faith and methods to convey the message to the poorest of the poor. After a priest failed to get a group of men to receive their first communion, Sister St. Brigid decided to work with them. She prepared them and when it came time for the occasion, she

realized they were hesitant. She explained that they did not have to have new clothes but that all they needed to do was be clean. She witnessed all of them walk up the aisle in their bare feet and receive the Lord.

After Vatican II Sister St. Brigid saw an opportunity to leave the classroom and do something different. She asked permission to go to Molokai, Hawaii, to work with people with leprosy. She was granted permission and went for a year in 1971. This activity fulfilled a wish to do missionary work that she had had since before she became a sister. In an interview upon her return from Molokai, she stated, "I feel it was a real privilege on the part of God to let me do this. I love these people. They are giants. Despite their suffering, half the letters I wrote for them said how good God is. Here they are, stripped of everything and they praise God for His mercy. I received more than I gave."

Sister St. Brigid also stated she felt she was returning to a sick world when she came back to the mainland. She said, "If people here would only realize what they have and thank the almighty God, what a different world it would be." While in Molokai her ministry was to write letters for the residents, do their laundry, read to them and take care of any other requests. One blind man with no hands asked if she would light his cigar. There was no hesitation; she lit cigars for him three times a day until he became too ill. As a result of her kindness, he came back to the church and received the last rites before he died.

Sister Ruth Marie Nickerson, CSC, had the privilege of visiting Molokai many years later. She was asked by a resident if she knew Sister St. Brigid. When she said yes, the man expounded on all the good Sister St. Brigid had done for the people living there.

Another passion in Sister St. Brigid's spiritual life was her dedication to the pro-life movement. She took part in several demonstrations. An incident was told about a young girl confronting Sister by saying, "I had an abortion. What do you have to say about that?" She calmly helped the girl realize that although the baby had died his soul was alive in heaven. She convinced the girl to pray to the child because the child loved her. Sister St. Brigid's words made a huge impact on the girl, who said no one had ever explained this to her.

Having lived out two of her callings, Sister St. Brigid was finally able to live the contemplative life of prayer when she retired and moved to Saint Mary's in 2000. In 2003 Mary Fran Meekison, a classmate, wrote, "Through six decades, you more than anyone in our class have been the most loved and enjoyed by all members, living and dead. Now that we are waiting for God's nod to enter heaven, won't you please send the living members at least one sentence." Sister St. Brigid enjoyed a full life in her 103 years. She finally received the nod on April 22, 2020, and now rests in the presence of God for all eternity.