

Sister M. Martin de Porres (Ostafinski), CSC

(Clara Barbara Ostafinski)

March 31, 1925–January 27, 2020

These memories were lovingly compiled by Sister Karla McKinnie, CSC, based on Sister Martin de Porres’ reflections on her life. They were read by Sister Judith Ann Murphy, CSC, at the funeral on January 30, 2020.

Sister Martin de Porres comes from a family of Polish ancestry, of which she was very proud. Her parents, Angela Orzech and Frank Ostafinski, arrived in the United States at a very young age and settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, later moving to Detroit, Michigan, where their last child, Clara Ostafinski was born on March 31, 1925. Being the youngest of nine children, she was, as her brothers often said, “spoiled rotten.” In spite of their frequent teasing, there was a love among them that was truly endearing. She had a close-knit family who continued to maintain a supportive relationship up until her death.

She made her first break from home when she was a junior in high school. She entered the High School Juniorate at Saint Mary’s, Notre Dame, Indiana, in 1941. She completed her junior and senior years at Saint Mary’s Academy on campus. She entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1943, and made initial profession in 1945 and perpetual profession in 1948.

The name Martin de Porres was of special interest to her, for she wanted to work among the African-American people. When she was in the novitiate, she thought she might receive as her religious name “Stanislaus Kostka,” in honor of the Polish saint. She had little hope of receiving the name Martin de Porres, to whom she had a special devotion. Thank God for small favors. She did receive the name and worked among African-Americans for seven years: four years in East Chicago, Indiana, and three in Cairo, Illinois.

As the years progressed, she completed her Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education at Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame. Her master’s degree in administration and supervision was obtained from Loyola University Chicago in Illinois.

Her ministry was varied from day one: teacher of grades three through eight, principal of three elementary schools and a pastoral assistant in four parishes. The major portion of her school ministry was in the Midwest. Upon her withdrawal from Sacred Heart School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, she felt the time was right for a complete change in her apostolate. She transferred to the Southern Region of the Sisters of the Holy Cross and began a new challenge: pastoral assistant in a Hispanic parish. After a year's time she was appointed treasurer and councilor for the Southern Region. The 12 years spent in Texas were rewarding and a real learning experience.

With a change of administration in the Southern Region, her service as treasurer and councilor was done. At that point she had completed 42 years of service in the community. Her need for renewal was keenly felt. Her request for a sabbatical was granted, and from 1986 to 1987 she participated in the CREDO spiritual renewal program at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington.

While on sabbatical, much time was spent reflecting on future ministries, and where she could best serve the community. Despite her age, she still felt she had enough spunk in her to continue in parish ministry. Rather than go back to Texas, she asked to work in the West and continue parish work. Her hope was to eventually be a parish administrator in an area of need. She was blessed with organizational skills, as well as being a good listener, was compassionate, even-tempered, and a person who liked to encourage others. Her ministry at St. Brendan Catholic Church in Los Angeles, California, and St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Parish in Tacoma, Washington, completed her service in the West and opened the doors to retirement.

Wherever Sister Martin de Porres served, people loved her and found her a warm but strong person. A student in the religious education program at St. Charles Borromeo was given the assignment by her school to identify a person she had great admiration for. The third grader responded as follows:

“In my church of Saint Charles Borromeo, there is an old lady called Sister Martin. She is about one step lower than the priest, but VERY respected. I admire her because not only does she love God, but she shares that love with others. Sister Martin really knows how to show her faith and trust in God. She is one of those people who really stands up for what she believes in.”

Her love was so transparent that a young child could see it.

Sister Martin stated that living and witnessing to the Gospel message was a challenge, but one would never know it. She exhibited peace in all situations, she was a loyal friend and a person committed to serving the poor. Her strong sense of justice shone forth.

As she moved from active ministry to Saint Mary's Convent, she shared, "Now that I have come full circle and will retire soon, feelings of gratitude and anticipation come to the fore. Mission, community, and prayer were the backbone of my religious life. The need to return [to Saint Mary's] will complete the circle."

Sister Martin de Porres completed the circle with peace, dignity and a quiet acceptance. Her community and caregivers found strength in her witness. Sister Martin, thank you for your life in Holy Cross. May you rest in peace.