

# **Sister María Luisa Güereña, CSC**

(Sister María Dominga)

September 13, 1928–July 22, 2020

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**These memories were lovingly compiled and written by Sister Margaret Ann Shield, CSC, in remembrance of Sister María Luisa Güereña, CSC, and were shared during the Mass of Christian Burial on August 17, 2020, at Saint Catherine by the Sea Convent Chapel, Ventura, California.**

Sister María Luisa, (Amada María Luisa Güereña), describes her own growing up in two worlds at the same time, the Hispanic world of her upbringing and the Anglo world of school, work and outside environment. She was delighted to be a girl, the second oldest among the nine children of José María and Magdalena Gómez de Güereña. In her culture that made her the third adult in the family. Their family followed religious values and customs as they had known in Mexico.

She tells of growing up in a difficult time when the economy was hard hit. She remembers her mother urging her to hurry as they picked oranges, walnuts or grapes. She describes her father as gifted with metal work—able to fashion knives, bracelets, and even a doll bed out of scrap metal—but having difficulty getting a regular job. Her mother was a healer, as well as a competent seamstress! María remembers, too, the great heartedness of their family, as her mother always found something to give “vagrants,” who went from house to house, and served them with her best dishes.

In a letter of recommendation, Sister M. Noel (Metcalf), CSC, wrote to then Provincial Mother Mary Agnes (Mahoney), CSC,

that “Mary Louise,” then in her junior year, had spoken to her about having a religious vocation for as long as she could remember. Sister Noel described “Mary Louise” as “a sincere, wholesome, dependable and happy girl ... one who was interested in the foreign missions, but glad to go wherever she was sent.” María was the first of the group of postulants to arrive at Saint Mary’s in the summer of 1946. This designated her as the mother/senior in the group of postulants ... and so she carried on her familiar post of “headship” among her “band,” as she had been the third adult in her family.

María, as she prefers to be called, describes herself as growing up in two worlds: the Hispanic world of her upbringing and the Anglo world of school, work and outside environment. She says that in the Novitiate she was asked to set aside her Mexican values and take on those of the community. She seems to have worked with this conflict all through her life.

Nursing was her preferred avocation, though her experience in nurses’ training after first profession was short-lived. At the sudden illness of another Holy Cross sister, María was asked to teach kindergarten in San Mateo, California. From then she ministered as a teacher for 28 years, serving in various schools in the Western Province. One of her most favorite times of ministry was the five years she spent in Brazil, where she felt very much at home. Sister also enjoyed her experience in the late 70s and early 80s as a technician at Franciscan Communications in Los Angeles, California, where she was both script and production supervisor.

In the dénouement of her life, María’s first love of nursing again came to the fore. Her care for the sick in Tijuana, Mexico, and her counseling in Spanish at the free clinic in Garden

Grove, California, were highlights. In October of 2005, María was at Saint Joseph Medical Center in South Bend, where she put together a much-appreciated manual on working with the Hispanic community. María 's experiences in Catholic Charities and as chaplain at Saint John's Hospital, Santa Monica, California; St. Jude Hospital, Fullerton, California; and Community Memorial Hospital, Ventura, were also very lifegiving for her, as well as for her patients. She describes her ministry there as a great gift, "being with people at the most sacred times of their lives, at birth and at death." Anointing "her" patients with holy ashes on Ash Wednesday was another special time of holy mindfulness for her and them. As chaplain, she was both spiritual director and grief counselor.

At Saint Catherine by the Sea, Ventura, California, María took time to apply her gifts of creative artistry, making pottery and painting watercolors and charcoals. She won many first-place prizes and honorable mentions at the Ventura County Fair. She prayed to St. Joseph and kept lovely gardens on the veranda outside her bedroom and among the grounds around it. María saw to it that Our Lady of Guadalupe had a dozen red roses on her feast day, remembering Juan Diego and his gift from the Mother. Sister also had the joy of being chief guest of a party at Saint Catherine's for her 90th birthday, with friends and family there to celebrate and cheer her on!

In speaking of the dead, María has said, "The dead are still part of us. We walk with our ancestors." So, we bid you, Amada María Luisa Güereña, our sister in Holy Cross, to walk on with great joy, having completed the course.

**These memories were lovingly compiled and written by Sister Mary Eliza (Martin), CSC, in remembrance of Sister María Luisa Güereña, CSC, and were shared during the Mass of Christian Burial on August 17, 2020, at Saint Catherine by the Sea Convent Chapel, Ventura, California**

Sister María Luisa Güereña began her journey in Holy Cross formally in August of 1946. Vatican II was still 20 years in the future. In those days candidates (pre-postulants) came to Saint Mary's and entered the postulancy. Each group was given a name. The generic name for such a group was "band." Each band was given a specific name. The band name for the group to which

María belonged was "Holy Cross." Members of a band were introduced to "religious rank." The first to arrive was ranked first, and all the rest followed according to their arrival date. María was the first to arrive from her group, so she was number one, and therefore, the "mother" of the band. Somehow this was significant. Even in later years, if a band member greeted María with, "Hello, band mother," María would greet her with a big smile.

At the end of the postulate, María received the habit and the name María Dominga Güereña. Later, María changed her name to Mary Louise Güereña. After several years, to honor her Mexican-American culture, Sister changed her name to Sister María Luisa Güereña. As a young religious, Sister recognized that the broader society was becoming very aware of the influences that cultural diversity in the United States has on our lives. María had indicated that she wanted to be a nurse, or possibly a lab technician, but instead she was a successful

teacher. Her skills, including her artistic gifts, helped her to reach the young elementary students very successfully.

One of María's interests was the foreign missions. The Congregation had been invited to ministry in Brazil. Initially the thought was to minister in health care. But the sisters reported back that working in education perhaps should come first, with the hope that some of those trained in the schools would be able to go into universities and be able to prepare to work in health care careers. María was asked to come to Brazil to minister in one of the schools. She did this and enjoyed telling interesting stories about her experiences there. She also learned to speak Portuguese.

In her later years, María learned the work of chaplaincy and worked in several hospitals. She received special training in chaplaincy for those who were from Spanish speaking countries, or who were native to the United States but also "culturally" Spanish.