



SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS

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WWW.OLDENBURGFRAUCISCANS.ORG



September 7, 2021

Dear Sisters, Associates, Co-workers, Family and Friends,

S. BERNETTA STUHRENBURG, OSF

In the quiet of late Monday evening, at 11:35 pm on September 6, Sister Bernetta Stuhrenberg passed peacefully into the waiting embrace of our God. Sister Jean Michael Sauntry sat prayerfully by her side as she made her final journey.

Clara Helena Marie was born in Duncombe, Iowa to farming parents Mary Adelaide and Henry John Stuhrenberg, who themselves had grown up in Indiana. Bernetta stated in her autobiography, “Another girl?—yes—but with love and affection I too was welcomed in to join my other three sisters and one brother—later two more bundles of joy (girls) completed our family!” All seven children arrived within ten years and “filled their [parents] hearts with laughter (and tears!)”, according to Bernetta. However, the total lack of opportunity for a Catholic education caused her parents to abandon their prosperous Iowa farm and return to Indiana. There, the family settled on a ranch and all seven children were enrolled in Catholic schools. The ranch provided the simple enjoyment of nature’s beauties as well as shared work experiences. Family trips to numerous states offered additional opportunities to enjoy God’s creation and developed Clara’s sensitivities to the glories of the natural world.

At age twenty, Clara moved to Cincinnati where she became employed as a cook and housekeeper. Seeking further challenges, she secured a position making war materials. Still not content, Clara enrolled at Miller’s Business School and was subsequently hired by an insurance company. Her sister, Addie, also secured a job in the same building. Bernetta stated, “It was at this time of our closeness together that we grew to share more deeply our thoughts, our inner most desires.” Restless still, Clara “was always longing for something more satisfying to do”. She revealed, “After much prayer and consultation with a close priestly friend—and Addie—I finally decided to try Oldenburg. I tried it—I liked it!” There, she accepted the name S. Bernetta. The following year, both sisters endured the pain of separation as Addie left to join the cloistered Trappistines in Massachusetts.

For 21 years, S. Bernetta served as an elementary school teacher. Her close friend, S. Mary Walter Sokolic, remembered, “Though gentle with the children, she demanded and expected students to work to their full potential. Throughout these years, her gentleness, firmness and joy were felt by the many with whom she came in contact.” Her enthusiasm took a new form as she recognized the need for lay ministers in parishes. Her fifteen years as Pastoral Associate at St. Catherine Parish in Westwood (Cincinnati) were enriching and fulfilling. “I truly loved visiting shut-ins, hospitals, and those in nursing homes,” Bernetta wrote. “Thus far, this was an even greater privilege to help the poor, bring hope to the forgotten, giving a listening ear to those who were alone and being sensitive to their pain.” Her ministry of presence to others took another direction as, for nine years, she became the After Care Specialist at Rebold Funeral Home.

At one point, Bernetta still felt drawn toward a more contemplative prayer life. This caused her to pursue a possible entry to a Community of Poor Clares, desiring “to live more deeply in His love.” The wise abbess offered Bernetta the following advice, which she kept among her treasures: “Perhaps your great desire and longing is to be found right in the community that you are in by trying to cultivate a deeper prayer relationship in the context of the life you already live.” Undoubtedly, Bernetta took these words to heart as she embraced her “retirement” ministry at Oldenburg. She continued to live a contemplative spirit as she offered companionship and service to Sisters in St. Clare Hall, visited neighboring nursing homes and shut-ins, and welcomed visitors at the Convent door. Her faithfulness and hospitality spoke of a deep inner life, the contemplative relationship with God which she had sought.

To the Sister-classmates and Community friends of S. Bernetta, to her family members and friends, we offer our deepest condolences. We thank the nursing and pastoral staff in St. Clare Hall for their loving care of S. Bernetta these past years.

In an “Addendum” to her autobiography, Bernetta expressed her greatest wish for the end of her life: “hopefully I’ll hear the words: ‘Faithful one, enter and be reunited with family and friends’! Oh, what joy that will be!” We celebrate the joyous reunion which Bernetta now lives in the beauty of eternal life!

In loving remembrance,

S. Delouise

S. Delouise

For the General Council

S. BERNETTA (Clara) STUHRENBERG, OSF

Born: August 1, 1928

Entrance into Religious Life: September 8, 1954

Entrance into Eternal Life: September 6, 2021

MISSIONS AT WHICH S. BERNETTA SERVED:

1959-1960	Holy Name, Beech Grove IN
1960-1961	St. Vincent Home, Vincennes IN
1961-1966	St. Lawrence, Lawrenceburg IN
1966-1973	St. Aloysius, Delhi, Cincinnati OH
1973-1976	St. James, Cincinnati OH
1976-1991	St. Catherine, Cincinnati OH
1991-1992	Volunteer, Cincinnati OH
1992-1999	Rebold Funeral Home, Cincinnati OH
1999-2021	Motherhouse, Oldenburg IN

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to Weigel Funeral Home – visit their website to view Sister’s online memorial, and if desired, an online condolence may be left on the site to share with her family and the Franciscan Sisters – www.Weigelfh.com

Memorial Donations in Sister’s memory may be given online at www.OldenburgFranciscans.org