

July 3, 2013

Dear Sisters, Relatives and Friends of Sister Monica,

Eunice Clementine Witte was born on August 26, 1926, in Plaza, ND, the third youngest of eleven children born to Theodore and Clementine (Woywode) Witte. Her upbringing on the farm of the plains of North Dakota seemed to have provided Eunice with her love of the air, grasses, and wide open spaces, as well as given her awareness of the harsh grace of a life wedded to the land. She came to know God in the small things – and little ones – of life.

The family moved several times while Eunice was still in school – from Plaza to Mohall to Des Lacs and finally to Hebron, ND, where Eunice graduated from Hebron Public High School in 1943. She started college at St. Catherine's in St. Paul, MN, in the fall of 1943, but was called back to help with the farm when six of her brothers were away in the service and her older sisters were either married or in the convent. She taught one year in the local country school where she decided that farm work was easier than teaching! In the fall of 1945, she was accepted by Mother Erica Hughes into the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity, at Marycrest in Denver, CO, where she entered on November 10 of that year. Her investiture was on August 15, 1946, where she took the name Sr. Monica. She made First Vows on August 16, 1947, and Final Vows on August 17, 1950. She received her BA from Regis College in Denver in August of 1960, and her MA from St. Mary's College in Xavier, KS, in 1964.

Over the years, Sr. Monica was assigned as teacher to many different houses of the province: St. Elizabeth's school in Denver (two times); St. Francis Mission in St. Francis, SD (two times); Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, SD (several times); St. Agnes School, Scottsbluff, NE; and St. Agnes Academy, Alliance, NE. She was also sent to Rome, Italy one year to serve the Generalate community, and early on she served as local minister in many of the above places, as well as at the motherhouse in Denver, CO. Of all of these places, Sr. Monica's heart was captured by the Lakota people on the reservations of South Dakota, where she felt utterly at home and where her vocation to "love God and serve people" was lived out with Franciscan simplicity, joy and hospitality. Sr. Monica thrived there for 39 of her 59 years of ministry.

In 2006 Sr. Monica left the Pine Ridge reservation, when she moved to Marian Residence in Alliance, NE, due to health concerns. She continued to receive visits from her good friends from Pine Ridge, and she continued to be of some financial assistance to those who sold bead work. In the early weeks of June, 2013, Sr. Monica began experiencing some strange symptoms, which were thought to be minor complications of some ongoing physical concerns. However, in the early morning hours of June 22, she awoke and in getting out of bed, had a fall. The care staff helped her back into bed, then left to get the equipment to take her blood pressure. When they returned minutes later, they found she had gone home to God.

A rosary was held on Wednesday, June 26, 2013, and the funeral was Thursday, June 27, both at Marian Residence. Her body was moved to Holy Rosary Mission, Pine Ridge, SD, that afternoon, where she was memorialized, honored in song and buried in the old cemetery alongside the other sisters there. Delphine Red Shirt, an author and former student, provided a rich reflection on her life. Her services were attended by many of the sisters, associates and friends along with her one surviving brother, Jim, and many nieces and nephews.