

Sister Raymond Griebel, CSA

Sister Raymond (Bernadette) Griebel, CSA, 79, a resident at St. Francis Home, passed away Friday, May 9, 2008 at the home.

Bernadette was born February 20, 1929, to Raymond Griebel and Helen Elizabeth Schoch Griebel in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

Taking her father's name, Bernadette became Sister Raymond upon entering the novitiate of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. Profession of first vows in 1948 fulfilled the first step of her lifelong dream to become a sister. The rest of her dream—to be a missionary—took a little time and a bit of divine intervention to become reality. Because of a rheumatic heart, Sister Raymond was unable to pass the physical that would allow her to go to the missions in Nicaragua. With a degree in education she was assigned to teach first in Marytown (1948), then St. Cloud (1950), and finally in Waunakee, Wisconsin, where she taught and served as principal from 1953-1961. There this native of Altoona, Pennsylvania, made deep and lasting friends, especially among the families of her students.



In Waunakee Sister Raymond shared her dream of being a missionary. One of her students diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor asked her if she thought he was going to die. Her honesty in the face of reality would not let her answer anything but the truth: he probably would die. As she prayed with him, she gave him a statue of St. Francis and asked the boy to go with the saint to ask God to send her to Nicaragua. Shortly after the boy's death, the general superior of the congregation told Sister Raymond that she could go to Nicaragua if she could pass the physical. A skeptical and slightly irritated doctor, who knew of her history of a bad heart, was surprised when her checkup was normal.

The second part of Sister Raymond's dream was fulfilled when she was assigned to Waspam, Nicaragua, in 1961. This woman with the missionary heart served primarily in Nicaragua, with short stints in Ecuador and Honduras and one year each in Nanty Glo, Pennsylvania (1966), and East Harlem, New York (1971), until failing health brought her back to the United States in 2000 and to the Sisters of St. Agnes retirement facility in 2002. She served in Latin America nearly 40 years, with more than 30 of them being in Nicaragua. From 1982-1990 she was the regional coordinator for all the Sisters of St. Agnes in Nicaragua.

Madre Raimunda, as Sister Raymond was known in Nicaragua, arrived in 1961 with baseball equipment and soon had the Waspam natives playing baseball. She brought her love for music and song both to her teaching and to her community life. She taught the children in the school and worked for the improvement of the primitive conditions of life for the Miskito Indians, the dominant culture in Waspam. Friends from Waunakee and Madison, Wisconsin, as well as from other areas of the country sent food, clothing, household items, medicines, school supplies, money, and other necessities to support Sister's work. With their aid, she established a sewing cooperative for women.

During the civil war in the 1980s, she was in Managua, serving as coordinator for the Sisters of St. Agnes. When she returned after the war, she found Waspam destroyed and the convent as well. The native people had been forced out. As the people returned and began to rebuild, the convent was rebuilt as well, but with inferior materials. Like the people, she and the sisters had to deal with

termites, low voltage electricity which sometimes led to the use of candles for light, poor plumbing, the scarcity of food, and non-potable water. Madre Raimunda, with her firm principles, courage, strong voice, exuberant spirit, and unlimited energy, became a tower of strength for the people.

Sister Raymond's leadership was recognized beyond Waspam. Though she did not actively participate in politics, she was trusted enough to be present at the peace dialogues between the rebel leaders and the government. When the government asked the rebels to turn in their guns for houses, some of the rebels gave their guns to Sister Raymond. And she went with the newly elected leaders in the 1990's to convince President Arnaldo Alemán that they wanted economic growth and security, not war and conflict.

When declining health brought Sister Raymond to retire, her heart was torn. She continued to be concerned about the people she left behind and did all she could to aid them from a distance. The nickels she won at bingo at St. Francis Home went to Nicaragua; other residents contributed their nickels as well. Her last desire was that the Nicaraguan Sisters be with her and sing Nicaraguan songs. They were with her shortly before she died, singing as she had requested. Vaya con Dios, Madre Raimunda, woman religious with a missionary heart.

Sister Raymond is survived by three sisters, Sister Louise Griebel, CSA, of Fond du Lac, Wilhelmina (Willie) Griebel of Altoona, PA and Louise Ann (Harry) Lund of San Antonio, TX; cousin, Sister Bertha Bumann, CSA; nieces Lisa (Steve) Finochio and Patrice (Mike) Del Baggio; other relatives, friends, and the members of the Congregation of Saint Agnes with whom she lived and ministered.

Preceding Sister in death is one sister, Mary Agnes Gillam.

Visitation: Visitation will be held on Monday, May 12, 9:00 AM to 1:45 PM at Nazareth Court and Center, 375 Gillett Street, where a prayer service will be held at 11:00 AM.

Services: A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 2:30 PM Monday at St. Francis Home Chapel, 33 Everett Street. Burial will be in St. Joseph's Springs Cemetery, Fond du Lac. Fr. Joe Wolf, Capuchin, will officiate.

Memorials may be directed to the Sisters of St. Agnes Development Office, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac, WI 54935.

The Sisters of St. Agnes are grateful to the nurses and staff at St. Francis Home and Hospice Hope for their care for Sister Raymond.