

Eulogy for Sister Mary Doreen Strahler, SND
by Sr. Margaret Gorman, SND

How fitting it is to celebrate Sister Mary Doreen on this beautiful autumn day. Her life and ministry were as varied as the seasons and as rich as the land that she considered to be a blessed gift from God.

Dorothy was born on March 23, 1929, in Suffield Township, Ohio, to Raymond and Stella Oakes Strahler. She was the fifth of 8 children: she had 3 older brothers—Roy, Marvin, and Herman—and a sister Loretta, better known to us as Sister Merita. After Dorothy came a brother, Earl, who died in infancy. Then two girls--Elma and Edna, who is now Sister Sylvia, a Medical Mission Sister.

As Sister Doreen's autobiographical writings describe, her family lived on a farm, in a "large white house on a country road without a name." Their address was RD#1. Every acre of land was used to best advantage. There were orchards, berry patches, and a large vegetable garden that yielded enough to feed the family, and more to take to market. There were hundreds of chickens, some pigs, and a herd of cattle, all needing to be tended daily. Dorothy started out by assisting her mother in the house, and then worked outdoors, where she learned how to shock wheat and oats, turn hay, and cut corn. "We were a family," she emphasized. "When old enough, each child helped out." In the evenings, they enjoyed playing baseball or croquet, as well as cards and puzzles.

At St. Joseph School in Randolph, the children met the Sisters of Notre Dame. Loretta had become an Aspirant after 8th grade, attending Notre Dame Academy on Ansel Road in Cleveland. Two years later, Dorothy was asked by her 8th grade teacher if she had thought about becoming a sister. She "had thought about it quite a bit," and joined the Aspirants that fall. The move to the city proved difficult; Dorothy confessed that she was ready to go home after the first week. "The street noise at night made me certain that I would never sleep again," she said. "I was not used to large classes, or being given subjects in which I had no interest. Though bewildered, I thought I should stick it out. By June, I had adjusted." She entered as a postulant on August 15, 1947, and at investment received the name Sister Mary Doreen. Immediately after first profession in 1949, she was sent to teach second grade, thus beginning 49 years in educational ministry. She earned a bachelor of science in education from St. John College, Cleveland, and a master of arts in education from St. Xavier College, Chicago. She taught every elementary grade, and was principal at St. Joseph Franciscan and then St. Benedict School, both in Cleveland. Often she taught 8th grade as well.

A marvelous community woman, Sr. Doreen spent 39 years as a much-loved local superior, including six years at the provincial center. Her role meant coordinating community schedules, housing, public events, and seeing to the daily needs of more than 300 sisters. We know that it could not have been as easy as Sister Doreen's pleasant, unruffled manner made it seem! If chairs were to be set up in the auditorium, she was the first one there. Outside she was a familiar sight in her blue apron, picking apples or berries on the property. Crafting lovely table decorations and creating prize-winning needlework were among her many hobbies. She had a knack for finding 4-leaf-clovers, and transformed Queen Anne's lace flowers into exquisite ornaments that still adorn our Christmas tree.

She became a poet at age 10, when confined to bed with measles. Too old to play with the dolls her mother brought her to pass the time, she wrote a poem about them instead. Her mother did not say the poem was good, but encouraged her daughter to write more. "Since that time I have written many good poems, and I encouraged my students to explore poetry through listening, reading, and writing," Sister Doreen explained. More than 300 poems came from her keen observation of the outer and inner worlds, and several were published in magazines and books of poetry. She took several poetry classes and experimented with a variety of poetic forms, including haiku, and wrote on many themes, including prayer, humor, wisdom and personal growth.

She planned the liturgy that we are about to celebrate, a final gift through which she shares with us her faith and experience of God. The tile she created for our chapel gathering area brought together her artistic ability, her reflection on her life as a spiritual journey, and her poet's gift for distilling deep meaning into a simple image: "I found the dark stone in the center at St. Joseph cemetery where my parents are buried. Through the years the outer covering has broken away little by little. To me it represents the breaking away and opening of my life to God, who surrounds me in the created world. A stone from Chardon, shells from the ocean, and stones from Rome all speak to me of places where God has led me and where I have seen God." Today I would like to close by reading one of her poems, written in 1998 and selected by The Poetry Guild as that year's \$1,000 Grand Prize Winner. It is her invitation to us, and her legacy.

Their Time

by Sister Mary Doreen Strahler, SND

As I walked the trail
that late autumn day
I spied a wild rose,
a few forsythia,
some apple blossoms,
and several violets in the grass.
Each flower was blooming boldly
in gusty abandon
out of proper time.

I knew not if they were attempting
to prolong the past season
or anticipate the next.

It mattered not, since either way
they proclaimed
their independence,
and their own right time.