

Remembering
Sister Irene Schnell
1932 - 2022



*“our oneness in Christ extends
beyond this life,
the bond of community
unites us even after death”
(Const. #59/d.31)*

On December 18, 2022 Sister Irene Schnell, formerly Sister Angela, entered the fullness of life. Sister Irene, the daughter of Flavian and Martina, was born 1932 at Marienthal, Saskatchewan. Both her paternal and maternal grandparents were immigrants to Canada from Romania.

One of fourteen children, Irene was educated in a one room country school before moving to Vibank to board with the Ursuline Sisters while she attended high school. She described her entrance into the Ursuline Community as a natural transition.

Sister Irene's Celebration of Life was held in the kiva at St. Angela's Meadow Retirement Lodge. Her life was celebrated with the life of Sister Loretta Ducharme who passed away only twenty-four hours after Sister Irene. These two faithful women had travelled together to Peru in September of 1964 and ministered to the people of Chiclayo for many years.

Sister Rose Marie Rau welcomed everyone to the prayer service which was open to friends and family members after many months of restrictions due to Covid 19. The readings were proclaimed by Sister Pauline Maheux and Sister Karen Gleeson. In her reflection, Sister Sheila McKinley described Irene's life as a "tapestry of rich and royal hue". In her various ministries Irene served in Saskatchewan, Ontario, Alberta and Peru. She worked as a teacher, catechist, pastoral minister, advocate and faithful companion, especially to those who were marginalized – the poor, imprisoned, refugees, those crushed by oppressive systems.

Throughout her life Irene aligned herself with vulnerable people and the vulnerable Earth. A lifelong learner, she appreciated the opportunities to learn about feminism, ecological justice and creation spirituality. As she enjoyed the beauties of creation she came to appreciate the writings of James Conlon.

Irene had a gift for languages and was fluent in English, Spanish and German. Her expertise was invaluable as she ministered in Peru and in the Windsor Refugee Office. She also applied her skills to translating documents from Peru and the annals from Ursulines of Vibank.

The Mass of Resurrection for Sister Irene and Sister Loretta was celebrated at the Blessed Sacrament site of the Catholic Family of Parishes. Ursuline Sisters, family and friends were warmly welcomed by members of the parish. Father John Jasica, the presider, was joined by Father Eugene Roy, a longtime friend of the Ursulines and fellow missionary in Peru. The choir and organist provided beautiful and uplifting music. The Mass was live-streamed, enabling many others, including the dear friends of Irene and Loretta in Peru, to join in prayer. Father Jasica reminded the congregation of the call to be joyful ministers of the Gospel and to work for justice – themes from the readings and from Irene's and Loretta's lives.

The prayers at the graveside were led by Sister Karen Gleeson. The crucifix was presented to Sister Irene's niece, Theresa Kiefer, as a reminder of the ongoing bond between the Ursulines and the members of Irene's family. For the first time in years, the Ursulines were able to invite family and friends for lunch following the prayers.

The following excerpt from James Conlon reflects both Irene's yearnings and accomplishments.

*I hope to be remembered...
As someone who embraced fully
The beauty and brokenness of life
The hopes, joys and sorrows of the moment
And worked to make them gestures of
generosity
To heal a brokenhearted world.*

(from James Conlon's Stars to the Street)

