



Sister Maria Dolores Muñoz, CSJ

September 7, 1930 ~ November 8, 2023

Virginia Muñoz was born in Los Angeles, the second child of Jose Luis Muñoz and Isabel Velasco. Both of her parents were immigrants from Mexico. Virginia was a twin, her sister Maria was still born and lived with her only in the womb. Jose and Isabel went on to have eight more children. Not counting Virginia's twin sister, there were ten siblings: Bernardo, Virginia, Daniel, Martha, Dolores, Margarita, Arturo, Isabel, Jose Luis, and Cristina. The last two were born after Virginia entered the convent. Her grandparents also lived with the family. Sister recalled, "During my childhood, actually all my life, my mom was a central figure in the family."

Virginia, As the first girl, was to follow the "mother's helper role, according to family custom." She would often come home from school and prepare the family's evening meal. Every time there was a new baby, she knew her play time would be curtailed. Fortunately Virginia enjoyed cooking and sewing. However, she admitted she did experience resentment at times, especially in the summer. In later years she reflected that her mother was gently teaching her service to others rooted in love.

Virginia's devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe began in childhood. Her mother and grandmother often exclaimed, "Mother of mine, Lady of Guadalupe." Virginia found Mary to be her intercessor, advocate and guide through many years and miles.

The family home was in East Los Angeles and all the children grew up in that barrio, attending the local public schools and attending catechism classes on Saturday and during summer vacation. Her mother wanted a Catholic education, especially for Dan and Virginia. There was no room for Dan in the 7th grade, but the Presentation Sisters had space for Virginia in the 8th grade. That was the beginning of their formal Catholic school education.

The following year, in the 9th grade, Virginia went to Catholic Girls High School (Conaty), where several congregations of sisters taught. The CSJs were in charge of her incoming freshman class and followed them through until graduation in June of 1949.

Through the years, Virginia had thought about becoming a sister, but her mother wanted Virginia to finish high school before making any decisions for her future life. In her senior year, following a question and invitation from Sister Sheila McCarthy to become a CSJ, Virginia's mother accepted her decision to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph. Sister Sheila was instrumental in helping her with the preparations to enter, beginning with the interview with the Provincial, Mother Rosemary Lyons.

In her interview with Mother Rosemary, Virginia told her that she didn't want to teach but preferred cooking for the sisters. Mother Rosemary's response was, "We'll see what obedience has to say about that." On September 15, 1949 Virginia entered the postulate and received the habit on March 19, 1950, and was known in religion as Sister Maria Dolores. Following the novitiate, she made temporary vows on March 19, 1952 and final vows on August 15, 1957.

In September 1952, Sister Maria Dolores was missioned to teach at St. Odilia Parish School in South Central Los Angeles. During this time she finished her studies and received her BA degree and elementary teaching credential. Later she completed a secondary credential. After six years at St. Odilia, she was missioned to San Diego, spending three years at OLP and three years at Cathedral High School.

During her last year at Cathedral she was selected to go to Peru. She was asked to first study for a Master of Science in Education which prepared her to teach at the University in Arequipa Peru. until July 2, 1965.

She arrived in Peru, JULY 2, 1965 and her first assignment was to teach at the Universidad Santa Maria in Arequipa. There she taught English as a second language and the rudiments of Tests and Measurements. During that time, her week-end activities included parish catechetical work, organizing students from the university, and visiting in the nearby men's prison.

Following Vatican II and the Latin American Bishops' meeting in Medellin, Columbia, the Church began to realize the need for religious to go out to the periphery, especially to the mountains. So in 1972, four sisters were given permission to "experiment" with missions outside of the established institutions. This was the beginning of 30 years of CSJ presence in Moho, a small town on the border with Bolivia. It was located near Lake Titicaca in the Department of Puno, commonly known as "the Altiplano".

Sister Maria Dolores' ministries in Peru were varied and challenging over the 53 years. Early in her Peruvian ministry, she was appointed the novice director, guiding our first Peruvian vocation, Sister Maria Rubina through her initial formation. Many years later, when Maria

Rubina was novice director, Maria Dolores served as her assistant, taking responsibility for the community and domestic formation of those in the novitiate at the time.

In addition to teaching at the University for 7 years, she served in pastoral ministry. Her mission assignments included Chimbote, Yanaoca, Arequipa, Moho and Lima. Like a history of CSJ involvement in Peru, her ministries involved doing whatever was needed at the time; prison ministry, leadership, formation, sputum analysis to identify TB patients, volunteering at a health clinic for the poor, teaching and supervising catechism classes, initiating women's groups, home visits, rural community formation, prayer groups, translating and assisting with computer skills.

As her energy diminished, Sister realized it was time to return to Los Angeles. At the age of 89, on February 6, 2019, Sister became a member of the Holy Family Community at Carondelet Center. She brought a quiet, peaceful and generous spirit. She also brought a wealth of experience and wisdom, stories about far flung ministry to third world peoples, all of them our dear neighbors. In 2020 we celebrated Sister Maria Dolores' 70th Jubilee, acknowledging the part the Holy One played in her generous life.

After hospitalization last August, St. John Hospital, Santa Monica, she was transferred to the rehabilitation center. Finally, she was moved to St. John of God retirement facility where she appreciated the presence of CSJ community members.

Now with gratitude, awe and wonder we can reflect on all Sister Maria Dolores accomplished through her lifetime of gentle, compassionate service, rooted in love.

~ Sister Frances Baker, CSJ