



Sister M. Hilary Cotter, SHF

January 2, 1912 -- January 7, 2007

Entered the Sisters of the Holy Family July 1, 1939

Final Profession of Vows August 2, 1944

Sister Hilary Cotter, SHF, died on Sunday, January 7, 2007, the Feast of the Epiphany, after a long illness. She had celebrated her 95th birthday just a week before her death, and had often spoken of her longing to “go home” to God.

Sister Hilary was born Helen Margaret Cotter on January 2, 1912, the daughter of Richard and Ellen Cotter of San Francisco. Her parents were married at Old St. Mary’s Church in San Francisco by Father John J. Prendergast, one of the founders of the Sisters of the Holy Family, and as a child Sister Hilary knew another SHF Founder, Sr. Teresa O’Connor, who served in the San Francisco parish the Cotter family attended.

In a 2005 interview with Sr. Michaela O’Connor, archivist of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Sister Hilary said, “In high school everybody wanted to be a sister. We read about Maryknoll and wanted to be Maryknoll, or we’d hear ‘Go to Mercy.’ I worked for a while, filing in an office, and attended Mulvihill Business

College.” She also worked for a while at Crown Zellerbach, but left at the age of 18 to take care of her mother, who had cancer.

After her mother died six months later, Sister Hilary remained at home to take care of her family -- “the youngest usually got that kind of duty in a family,” she said -- and entered the Sisters of the Holy Family on July 1, 1939. She made her final vows on August 2, 1944.

In her 67 and a half years as a Holy Family Sister, Sister Hilary has served in various assignments in San Francisco, as well as San Anselmo, Hayward, Modesto, Reno, Carson City, Burlingame, Mission San Jose and Livermore.

In 1953, while she was serving in Carson City, Sister Hilary was seriously injured when the car she was driving left the road on the Donner Summit grade. One sister died in the accident and three others were seriously injured.

Sister Hilary retired from active ministry in 1979, and since then has lived at the Motherhouse in Fremont.

In talking about her entrance into the Sisters of the Holy Family, Sister Hilary cited “Sister Daniel, who had a great gift for helping the poor...When I think about the charism of the community, I think of the crest that Sr. Jean Creager designed, and the words from Sister Dolores that Sister Maureen put inside the little card with the crest on the outside. The words are from Sister Dolores; that’s it -- that’s the spirit of the community.”

The words in the card that Sister Hilary referred to include:

“The spirit of the Holy Family should guide and govern all our actions. All our hopes of happiness depend, not only on the love of Jesus Christ, but likewise his infinite mercy to all. By our title of Sisters of the Holy Family we are bound to the particular exercise of this heavenly virtue which is manifested to others by pity, tenderness, goodness, willingness to spare and save, clemency, mildness and unwillingness to punish.”

-- *Sr. Carol J. Crater*