

February 15, 2024

A MESSAGE IN HONOR OF OUR DEAR SR. LILLIAN GEHLEN, OP: OUR SAINT WHO GOES HOME LIKE A SHOOTING STAR!

Our hearts bleed but not so much of pain but of GRATITUDE for a life so full, so rich, so admirable. That life was personified in Sr. Lillian Gehlen, OP whom we were blessed to have known and shared life within Nigeria for over two decades.

Sr. Lillian came as a missionary in Nigeria about the year 1967. She managed our clinic on our compound in Gusau till it was taken over by the government about the year 1975. Thereafter, she worked at the General Hospital, Gusau. She dedicated herself to her job putting in her all in serving the sick. Many times, she would go to see how the patients were doing whether it was her shift or not. Such was the fervor of compassion with which she carried out her ministry of healing as a nurse. Sr. Lillian stopped her nursing assignment when there was need for a Novice Directress. Sr. Lorena Bolte (of blessed memory) who had been the Novice Directress from 1977 to late 1985 was elected Superior of the Nigerian Dominican Sisters late 1985. So Sr. Lillian took over from her in 1986 and served in this capacity till she was recalled back to the United States of America in 1993.

As novice directress, Sr. Lillian was gentle but firm. She had a way of making the novices comply with instructions without being high-handed or condescending. When she would say something like, "Would you like to go and help the procurator put stuff away in the pantry, okay?" The novice knew straightaway that she had to be on her way to the pantry. Sr. Lillian was unassuming and a gentle, graceful presence amongst us. Her virtues of humility, simplicity, honesty, caring, generosity, hospitality and modesty were the way she ingrained in the hearts of her novices, the essence of the Dominican life. She was a book of the Dominican life!

Sr. Lillian's love for the Nigerian community cannot be overemphasized. She believed in the ability of the community to grow and flourish thus she was unwavering in her support. Although she physically left the shores of Nigeria in 1993, she never really left as she remained a faithful companion to us and gave us hope in times of despair.

Together with her fellow missionaries who sowed the seed of the Dominican life on our soil and especially those of them who have gone to meet the Lord, Sr. Lillian's sacrifices is etched indelibly in our hearts and no tide of time will wash them away.

We rejoice in our hope in the resurrection which gives us the assurance that we shall again see these beautiful brides of Christ, Srs. Lorena Bolte, Frances Bernacki, Lillian Gehlen, Bernadette Beckerman, and Charlotte Unrein being gorgeously crowned with the reward of their labor of love in Nigeria.

May Our Mother Mary, St. Dominic, and St. Catherine of Siena lead our beloved Sr. Lillian to Abraham's bosom, Amen.

Yours in Dominic,

Sr. Justina I. Nnajiolor, OP
Prioress General