

SISTER BERENICE LEE

03.11.1938 – 10.03.2024

Sister Berenice was born, Bridget Helen on the 3rd November 1938 to Patrick and Mary Ann Lee, at their home in Castlefrench, Ballinamore Bridge, Ballinasloe, Co Galway. She was the youngest of four children. She received her Early Years education at the local Primary School and her Secondary Education at the Marist Convent School Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim. Following in the footsteps of her 'Marist' aunts, Sisters Columbanus and Thérèse, she entered Saint Brigid's novitiate in Carrick-on-Shannon on 18th August 1955 and at her First Profession on 20th August 1956, was given the name of Berenice. Down the years, Berenice availed herself of a variety of ongoing formation programmes including Marist renewals, Spirituality and theology programmes, human and spiritual development etc. These greatly supported and enhanced what was to be a life, lived in the service of others. And through all of it, she relied heavily on her 'Simple Prayerbook' as her hand book for life.

A caring, compassionate person by nature, Berenice was well suited to the nursing profession where she trained as a State Registered Nurse at Saint Andrew's Hospital, Dollis Hill, London. Other qualifications followed as she studied Midwifery, District Nursing, Bereavement, Counselling etc. A diligent and conscientious student, Berenice enjoyed the challenge of preparing for what was to be a blessed and wide-reaching ministry to the sick in hospitals, clinics and on the districts connected to our communities in England and Scotland. To all she was welcomed, in the words of one of her patients as 'a true angel of goodness, mercy and compassion.'

Always ready to serve where she was most needed, her nursing ministry took her to Fulham, Sunninghill, Nympsfield, White City, Upper Holloway, Stirling, Egham Birmingham etc. Her years in the role of manager of 'Villa Maria' in the mid-nineties were very special to her and again she gave of her very best, caring for the retired sisters; leading her staff and building on the foundations already in place.

Retirement from her professional nursing duties, was anything but 'retirement' for Berenice! Working as a voluntary hospital chaplain in the Whittington Hospital in London, she was tireless in her service and was forever engaging with patients, families, and the hospital staff. She was loved and appreciated by all and is still remembered with love and gratitude. This pattern of life continued throughout her years of retirement as she served in a variety of communities where her priority was to be of service - she was never slow in offering a helping hand as well as continuing in various voluntary roles outside of the community; parish support, visiting the sick in their homes, meeting with pilgrims in Walsingham etc.

Towards the end of 2014 due to failing health Berenice joined the Villa Maria community as an active retired member of the group. And active she remained! Throughout the following years she continued in her generous selfless way, to be available to support, assist sisters and staff as occasion demanded.

She loved her family very much and she knew that she in turn, was very much loved by all of them. She welcomed visits and regular phone calls from them and was grateful for the many gifts they showered on her. She in turn, loved to share all she received!

Slowly, through 2023, our dear Berenice began to 'slow down' and to need extra medical care. Her days became shorter as she grew tired and needed to rest and to sleep. Still, she appeared most days in the chapel and dining room here she insisted on serving the water and generally keeping an eye on things until that too became too much.

For the last month or so of her life, she was confined totally to bed where she received the best of care, gentle and compassionate, from the Villa Maria staff. She was seldom alone as members of the community visited or sat with her every day. She was always grateful for the company and the opportunity to pray aloud, chat briefly or just to be quiet with her.

God gently called her to Himself, in the early hours of 10th March. Her work was done. Although we miss her presence among us, we rejoice that her suffering is over and that she is at rest with the God whom she served faithfully to the end.

