

Sr. Hildegarde Hellmuth
October 20, 1909-October 5, 2003

Hildegarde Hellmuth, daughter of William George Hellmuth and Harriet Mary Fowler was born in St. Louis Missouri on October 20, 1909, the only girl in a family of four boys. In her autobiographical notes we learn that she had a happy childhood both at home with her siblings and at City House which she attended for twelve years. She wrote of that time in her life, "My recollections of school life are not very edifying. I loved boys' games and didn't like to study. I never had a ribbon and seldom got my Tres Bien but managed to graduate in 1927."

She then went on to Maryville College, graduating in 1931. After spending three months in Europe, she entered the Society of the Sacred Heart at Kenwood on January 5, 1932. She made her vows in 1934 and then went to Cincinnati where for three years she served as teacher, Surveillante, and dormitory mistress. Another two years followed at Villa Duchesne before probation at Kenwood under Mother Agnes Barry and final profession on February 15, 1941. Her memoir continues, "When I returned to the Southern Vicariate I was at the Rosary in New Orleans for one term, then to Villa Duchesne for five years. I do not remember all the details but teaching was 'not my cup of tea'. I was delighted to return to the Rosary in 1945 as local treasurer. In 1949 I was named Vicariate Treasurer which became my favorite job for twenty-five years."

This began the apostolate for which she was so well suited and which was to prove so fruitful. Notes about her life as treasurer describe some interesting adventures. "I feel I inherited my mother's gift for bargain making. My first opportunity was buying large supplies of government surplus equipment and food for our houses in Italy, which were shipped free thanks to a generous shipping company in New Orleans. Another achievement was the purchase of property in Houston, not a bargain, but a very successful one in establishing our school there which has flourished. One of the most interesting events was the purchase of Maryville University property. When taxes increased, some local farmers offered to sell us their farmlands-seven properties in all-bargains which I could not refuse."

Those who lived with Hilly during these years remember her as someone who knew herself, her debits and assets. They describe her as a very happy person, a fun-loving community-builder, humble and devoted. They recall her as a wonderful treasurer, very generous, one who created a sense of stability, a feeling that everything was under control. One wrote, "She was a great-hearted woman and a lover of the Society. A simple, profound faith led her to seek God in all things, especially in prayer." Hilly said of herself, "I want to bring joy into the lives of others by thoughtfulness and generous sharing both materially and spiritually".

She did this until 1972 "when changes in financial government became too much for me. I continued as community treasurer in Houston, 1973-75. From 1975 to 1982 I was coordinator of the retirement community at Regis Hall in St. Charles when a very special event occurred."

That event came in the form of a letter from the Central Team to the U.S. Provincials requesting help in “finding a superior for the community of elderly sisters at Tal Virtu, Malta. What kind of person is needed? Someone, above all, with a big heart . . . She should be a person with inner resources to draw on, because it will be a lonely time in many ways . . . the person should have the conviction that she is being called to a real mission”. Sister Hellmuth was on her way to Malta on March 7, 1982.

Some years later she wrote “the call to serve the Society in Malta was perhaps the most unexpected and rewarding of my life . . . I spent five and one half happy fruitful years. I made lasting friendships not only with RSCJ but with some lay people and still keep in touch by letter, telephone, E-mail and prayer.”

She returned to St. Charles in 1987 and devoted her time and energy to what she termed community service. “I felt I could share my joy with others and loved taking them for rides, shopping etc. I was able to collect food for the poor, visit and bring Communion to the sick. This all ended the day I fell on an icy street and injured my back, December 4, 2000. I really miss the joy it gave me and thank God for such a rewarding time in my life.”

Sr. Hellmuth joined the Oakwood Community in the spring of 2001. Although often in a great deal of pain, she participated fully in community life until her last week. She almost seemed one day to say, as did Paul “ Now is the time of my deliverance. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:6) She remained conscious and responsive until the last few hours before she slipped away peacefully on October 5, 2003.

One who called after hearing of Hilly’s death spoke of her devotion to the Trinity, and her awareness of Father, Son and Spirit acting in her life. In her notes Hilly had mentioned that during probation she received insights into the Trinity and then added, “At home later, a Superior advised me not to speak of the Trinity. Maybe I went too far. Sometimes I wonder if I am kidding myself.” She doesn’t have to worry about that now.