Vita of Sister Lucille Schmitmeyer

A baby girl was born April 17, 1933, to Ben and Agatha Schmitmeyer on a farm near Maria Stein in Mercer County, Ohio. She was given the name Lucille in her baptism at her home parish, St. Sebastian’s. She grew up with three brothers (Luke, Ernest, and Martin) and five sisters (Marian, Eunice, Hattie, Ella Mae, and Mary Evelyn). Eunice, Ella Mar, Hattie, and Martin survive.

Lucille entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis of Tiffin, Ohio, in 1951. She tracked the beginning of her call to the summer after her sophomore year at St. John’s in Maria Stein. While she and some other family members were washing the family car, her mother asked her if she wanted to be a sister, and she responded with a quick “yes.” Recounting that experience, Lucy commented that her mom must have seen that she was so inclined. Lucy said that her dad later picked up on that and asked what she wanted to do as a sister. She responded that she wanted to be a teacher or a nurse, “because that’s what sisters did.” Lucy said later, “In my mind I saw myself driving a red jeep as a missionary in some foreign country.” In actuality she was a missionary from 1978 – 2002. Part time she rode a horse.

Although the Precious Blood order served many parishes in Mercer County, Fr. Harold Diller (Sister Adela’s brother) offered to show Lucy and Patricia Ann Froning, another girl from St. Sebastian, the Franciscans in Tiffin. Lucy said that Sister Adela was a “wonderful inspiration.” That fall Lucy became an aspirant in Tiffin, entered the convent, and received the name Sister Mary Giovanni August 12, 1951. She made her first profession August 12, 1953, and final profession in 1956.

Sister Lucille graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Social Studies from Mary Manse College, Toledo, and with a master’s degree in Education Administration from Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. She spent 23 years teaching in elementary schools in Edgerton, Fort Jennings, Millersville, New Cleveland, and Delphos. While at Fort Jennings, she served as director for the Summer Migrant Program. She also served as principal in New Cleveland and Fort Jennings. In 1978 Sister Lucille participated in a program at the Latin American
Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas, studying the various aspects of the life and culture of the Latin American people. From there she went on to Chiapas, Mexico, where she began pastoral ministry in the Diocese of San Cristobal, which borders Guatemala. She noted the high level of poverty and illiteracy there. Her time in Las Rosas, on one of seven pastoral teams of the diocese was cut short by a rapid-growing aneurysm and loss of eyesight. During surgery for this, she suffered a slight stroke and was unable to return to her ministry in Mexico.

In June of 2009 she began living at St. Francis Home and doing a ministry of prayer and service there. She said she was grateful to have extended time for meditating every morning and was praying for the needs of the Home’s residents, the community, her family, and for peace in the troubled world. Lucy said she enjoyed visiting other residents, getting to know them, and engaging in conversation with them. She said, “I believe that each elderly person living at St. Francis Home is a ‘gold mine.’ In learning to know each person and conversing on a daily basis, I can learn and can grow in wisdom, if I listen to them attentively.” She gave an example: “Irvin Wagner, a resident, spoke German, so I and he exchanged greetings in German. Then I learned that he used to make brooms for our sisters in the early days. The broom corn was raised on our land. His brother, Elmer Wagner, was employed at the convent.

She regularly left the Home to go along with Sister Maureen or another sister who visited and prayed at the Seneca County jail. Sister Lucy was especially helpful to those speaking only in Spanish. On two occasions, former inmates – once a man, once a woman – recognized Sr. Lucy and thanked her for visiting them in prison. Both were seeking jobs at the time.

She loved to have snacks and little treasures to give to those stopping by for a visit. Many –especially young relatives—often received prayer cards honoring St. Lucy, her patron. She frequently invited younger persons to consider life as a Sister of St. Francis—as she had been invited.

And now, on January 16, 2021 God invited her, accompanied by Saints Lucy, Francis and Clare, and all who have gone before, to come into the Divine Presence, to receive the Treasure of Eternal Life.