

Obituary of
Sr. M. Winfrieda Bugayong, OSB
September 5, 1950 – April 8, 2023



It was at 4:30 in the morning of Holy Saturday, April 8, when Christendom was in the suspended state of waiting for the great event of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, that Sr. M. Winfrieda Bugayong, OSB breathed her last at St. Benedict's Home in Marikina and entered into the glorious risen life of her Savior. She was 3 days short of reaching her 103rd birthday.

Milagros Adelina Bugayong was born on April 11, 1920 in Intramuros, Manila, the second child of 7 children of Deflin Bugayong and Concepcion Caoile. The family's hometown was in Mangatarem, Pangasinan but Milagros was born in Manila because her father was then preparing for the law bar examinations.

As a young lady, Milagros had a vibrant social life. She never missed a dance in town. She graduated at the Philippine Normal School in Manila with a combined course in Education and Home Economics and eventually landed a job as a teacher of Home Economics to sixth graders in Mangatarem. But then her life, as well as the lives of all Filipinos, took on a drastic turn. World War began in 1941 and eventually, Japanese forces occupied the country. With her father's life endangered, the family had to evacuate to Lingayen on October 1943. This interruption, however, became God's way of introducing her to the Missionary Benedictine Sisters through a high school friend who was then a Benedictine postulant.

Sr. Winfrieda's entrance to the convent was challenging. It was war time. It was not easy to procure the things that she was required to bring to the convent. Travel too was difficult. Accompanied by her father, they took a cargo train or *bagon* from Dagupan to Manila where she was hoisted through the window and her father had to climb over sacks of rice blocking the doors. Several months later, when bombings became intense, the postulants were advised to go home. She asked to stay in the convent – and had stayed on until her last breath.

When the US liberation forces bombed and burned St. Scholastica's College in 1945, the Sisters and the formandeas were forced to evacuate to San Fernando, Pampanga. It was there where Sr. Winfrieda spent her novitiate and made her First Profession of Vows on August 20, 1946. Her Final Profession of Vows, however, was made in Manila on January 31, 1950.

Sr. Winfrieda was sent for further studies in Elementary Education at St. Paul's College which cemented her apostolate in educating and forming young people, first as a teacher in our schools in Manila, San Fernando, Bacolor, Angeles, Taal, Marikina and as Principal in Bacolor, Marikina, Bacolod and Taal. She also became Superior of several communities such as in Angeles, Tabunok, Taal and Baguio. She was sent to international mission in New Norcia, Perth, Australia from 1982 to 1987 where she was given the responsibility of being Superior of the

community. In 1998, she returned to Australia this time in Kalumburu mission in Wyndham, Western Australia again as Superior of the community working with the aborigines. For her dedicated work, Sr. Winfrieda was awarded a Certificate of Recognition from the Philippine Embassy in Australia.

Service for Sr. Winfrieda meant taking on any assignment such as being treasurer, canteen supervisor, refectorian and Christian Children's Fund (CCF) Superintendent. She was also fondly remembered for her friendly and caring ways as the Sister-in-charge of the parlor or front office.

But two significant contributions stand out that has far reaching impact on our Priory – first, Sr. Winfrieda was instrumental in setting up the work with the indigenous peoples, the Aytas, in Angeles, Pampanga. Second, she was the Priory's connection with the late Fr. Bernhard Philberth of the Philberth Scholarship foundation.

The apostolate with the Aytas was started by a German Sister - Sr. Waltraud Dreier OSB and as Superior of the Angeles community and CCF Superintendent, Sr. Winfrieda got involved. The occasional visits to the Aytas slowly became an organized mission and in the 4th Priory Chapter of 1978, Sr. Winfrieda and the Angeles community proposed an OSB community among the Aytas. This involvement turned into a priory-wide mission – it became one of the four-pronged thrust of Manila Priory, that is, “to initiate direct missionary work among non-Christian Filipinos.”

During her assignment in New Norcia, Perth, Australia, Sr. Winfrieda got to know the late Fr. Bernhard Philberth, a German physicist and Catholic priest. From her initial request for a scholarship in 1986, Fr. Bernhard then set up the Philberth Foundation that have helped (to date) more than 2,000 scholars obtain a college degree.

In 2001, Sr. Winfrieda was transferred to St. Benedict's Home. She was still actively involved in several work in the convent but advancing age and deteriorating health made her slow down and then eventually was bound to a wheelchair. In February of last year, she contracted COVID 19 but survived it. She was diagnosed of end stage renal disease and in her last days suffered from acute renal failure. She also succumbed to pneumonia and sepsis and did not respond anymore to treatment. She died of multiple organ failure.

Up until the end, at 102 years old, Sr. Winfrieda had still a sharp and clear mind and a loving and caring disposition. She was patient and uncomplaining and maintained a high level of social contact that made her age graciously. She wore a smile like her second skin, her hand always reached out to touch, her heart was full of concern and compassion towards her family, those she lived with and towards the poor. Peace was the gift she gave to others, love was her life motto and giving herself to God and to His people was what she lived for.

Psalms 143.8 is one of the favorite Scripture text and prayer of Sr. Winfrieda: “At dawn let me hear your kindness for in you I trust. Show me the path I should walk; for to you I entrust my life.” The journey of 76 years of religious life has been put to a close and Sr. Winfrieda now journeys into eternity. May she be immersed in the love and mercy of God for all things work together for those who love Him.