

Eulogy. Sr Bernardine Angel

Bernardine was a local girl, as she was born in 1933 in Norwood. She had two brothers, Raymond, who has gone to the Lord, and Aidan who is here today.

She did her Teacher Training right here on this site, at Coloma College – and it was here that she met the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. She made her First Vows in 1963 and her Final Vows in 1969. She was known then as Sister Gemma until 1986 when she went back to using her baptismal name.

When my group entered the novitiate in Forest Hill in 1961, Gemma was already the Senior Novice. She must have almost despaired of us as we were a large, noisy group and very unaware of how we should be behaving as young postulants. One of the Community there commented that my group did not enter, but rather we invaded! Gemma did her very best to guide us into the correct way of doing things, but she certainly had her work cut out. However, we did get there in the end!

Gemma always had a love of music, which she shared with her father. I remember so well the fact that he wrote a special musical setting of The Beatitudes, which Gemma taught us, and which we sang with great gusto.

Gemma loved teaching. She began her teaching career in 1963 in our Prep School, St. Anne's in Sanderstead. She then moved down, the following year to our school in Guildford, Merrow Grange, where she taught both Maths and Religious Education. She was there for 4 years before she took on a really difficult task of teaching in both Coloma and St. Anne's College and moving between the two schools before they merged. Here she taught both O Level and A Level Scripture, which she really loved.

Between 1975 and 1978, Gemma studied for a Bachelor of Divinity degree at Heythrop College in London. She lived on this site again, in our West Wickham Convent.

Then came a complete change in her ministry, as she moved down to our house in Mawgan Porth, Cornwall. She was the parish sister in Truro parish, and absolutely loved Cornwall – and indeed the people loved Sr Bernardine there. There was a great deal of travelling every day – and she took this in her stride, heading off in her car each day to be there in time for Mass. She was responsible for the parish catechetical programme, as well as visiting the house-bound with Holy Communion.

She then returned to the London area and worked first in Addiscombe parish for a short time – then in Thornton Heath parish. Her love for dogs came to the fore in Community, where she took over the care of the Community poodle, Kim. A photo of Bernardine with Kim is on the back of your booklet.

Yet another change of ministry awaited Bernardine, as she responded to a request to become a Chaplain in the Navy. She did this for a few months, then applied to the RAF to become a Chaplain with them. She absolutely thrived in this ministry, and was most devoted to all things RAF and was animated when sharing this with the DMJs when she came for our Spring and Autumn Days. She had a great rapport with the young men and women who were just beginning their RAF careers – and as you will see on the back cover of your booklets, she joined in their activities with great enthusiasm when she could. Bernardine was in this ministry for 12 very happy years, until she retired from the RAF in 2000.

Through her RAF contacts, Bernardine was offered a house in West Newton, which is on the Queen's Sandringham Estate. I signed the Contract as DMJ Provincial for this property, along with a representative of Her Majesty. Once again, Bernardine thrived in her new ministry of working in the parish of Kings Lynn, Norfolk. Once again, she was on the road daily, heading off to Mass and parish work there. She is well-remembered there, and we have had messages from the parish priest recalling her devoted ministry there and assuring us of their prayers in Kings Lynn. Bernardine lived quite close too to Walsingham, where she spent many happy hours and sent many cards from there to her many friends.

Bernardine moved to Coloma Court initially to recuperate after her heart surgery, and then became a permanent resident in 2016. We would like to thank all the Staff of Coloma Court for the many years of devoted care that she received there. It was big shock to us all when she collapsed there on the morning of Christmas Day, and was rushed into hospital. She died peacefully that evening, with her niece Sonia with her.

May Bernardine now rest in peace with the Lord whom she loved and served so faithfully all her life.