



Sister Bettina (Mary Cabrini) Mollica, OP
(1939 – 2014)

In her autobiography, Sister Bettina described herself as a person who felt deeply, with a reflective nature. She wrote that people were important to her, especially their well-being. She was anxious to help bring about justice in society and in the Church, and the principles of Vatican II were very important to her. In her early years she held conservative beliefs, but had moved to more liberal values in her later years. “So be it!” she wrote.

One of her final statements was, “I would like to be remembered as a deeply caring person; loyal, dedicated, and honorable; gentle and passionate in a quiet way, with a dry humor sprinkled in.”

She was born on November 27, 1939, in Mansfield, Ohio, to Anthony and Rosina (Villalla) Mollica, the youngest of their four children. Antonia, Lewis, and Gerald had preceded her into the family. Her father had come to the United States from Italy at the age of seventeen; and her mother, of Italian heritage, was originally from Alliance, Ohio. She described her father as “a true gentleman,” one who treated all people, regardless of income or social standing, with dignity and respect. She wrote of her mother’s dedication to the family and to the Church. “My parents were instrumental in giving me my initial beliefs/values.”

All of the Mollica children attended the parish school, St. Peter School, with the Joliet Franciscans, for their elementary and secondary schooling.

My dad brought with him from Italy a large sea shell with a hand-painted image of Mary giving the rosary to Dominic and Catherine. As a little girl, I was fascinated with this image inside the shell. Remember, I knew nothing about Dominicans as I was “reared” by Franciscans. In truth, my first desire was to be a Franciscan ... but God had other designs for me.

When Bettina graduated from St. Peter High School in June 1957, she continued her education at the College of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois. In May 1961, she received a bachelor’s degree with a major in history and minors in Spanish and philosophy. A year of teaching in a public school followed.

Although she did not tell us how, Bettina became acquainted with the Adrian Dominicans. On September 8, 1962, at the age of twenty-two, she entered the Adrian postulate. She received the habit and her religious name on August 6, 1963, and was known as Sister Mary Cabrini until the 1970s. On August 7, 1964, she professed her first vows. She wrote that she spent thirty years looking at the images of Mary, Dominic, and Catherine in Holy Rosary Chapel, but not really seeing them.

Upon the loss of that sea shell (Dad gave it to me) when my apartment was destroyed by a gas explosion, I was heartsick. Five months after the explosion, I was sitting alone in Holy Rosary Chapel one evening and for the first time I really saw the images above the main altar. The

mystery had finally disclosed itself—I was truly where I belonged. The mystery of my Dominicanism had finally come full circle. In the words of Adrian VanKaam, I was “becoming the person God intended for me to be from all eternity.” . . . Now that is an AHA moment!

For the first ten years of her ministry, Sister Bettina served in Michigan high schools teaching history, religion, and Spanish. Within a short time of profession, she was on her way to Detroit, where for four years she taught at Dominican High School. In 1968 she was changed to St. Alphonsus in Dearborn, where she served for two years. She then spent a year at Bishop Gallagher High School in Harper Woods.

In 1971, Sister Bettina was a full-time student at Wayne State University in Detroit. That year resulted in a master’s degree in history in 1972, after which she returned to Dominican High School for another three years.

Sister Bettina spent the summer of 1975 at Niagara University in Niagara, New York, and earned a certificate in campus ministry. That fall found her serving the Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio, as a campus minister for a year. An article in the *Catholic Universe Bulletin* for October 1976 described the ministry of Father Elmer Marquard, a Newman Center campus minister, which also involved Sister Bettina. A picture of Sister appeared, among others accompanying that article. The article read in part:

Father Marquard shares responsibilities with his Newman co-chaplain, Adrian Dominican Sister Bettina Mollica. They each make the eighty-mile trip around Wayne General and Technical College of Akron University, Agricultural Technical Institute of Ohio State University, Wooster College, and Ashland College weekly, and this necessitates a lot of communications.

For the next year Sister Bettina served as campus minister at Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport, Connecticut, then returned to the Midwest as campus minister at the Newman Foundation of the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois.

In 1982 she was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, again as a full-time graduate student, but this time at Duquesne University. She studied formative spirituality under Adrian Van Kaam. That year resulted in a second master’s degree.

For the next three years, Sister Bettina was campus minister and adjunct professor at Ohio Dominican College (ODC) in Columbus, Ohio. There, she met Sister Roberta Miller, a Dominican Sister of Peace, and they became fast friends. Her file contains an article, including a large picture of her, about her appointment to ODC that appeared in an unidentified newspaper.

In 1986, Sister Bettina began twenty-eight years of free-lancing in adult education and spiritual direction. For a time she served as an adjunct professor under the auspices of Ohio Dominican College, teaching, in Columbus and throughout Ohio, two courses that she designed. These were spirituality workshops for health care professionals and paraprofessionals. She also traveled in Western Europe with family members and friends, especially in England and Italy.

Sister Bettina and Sister Roberta had the opportunity to live in Kenya and give workshops to the native Dominican sisters. In 2010, they taught in Chemchemi, an educational institute servicing East African congregations. Sister Bettina called these experiences among her “greatest blessings in life.”

Diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2011, Sister Bettina suffered surgery and chemotherapy treatments, causing loss of energy. She wrote, “My faith and hope in a loving God carries me through difficult times. Of course, this is augmented by a wonderful family, congregation, and friends. Such support is priceless.”

In early May 2014, Sister Bettina returned to Adrian as a resident of the Dominican Life Center/Maria. God called her to eternity on May 16 at the age of seventy-four.

A wake-remembrance service was held for Sister Bettina in St. Catherine Chapel on May 19. Sister Mary Ellen Youngblood, Chapter Prioress of the Adrian Crossroads Chapter, extended sympathy and welcomed Sister Bettina’s many relatives and friends who had gathered to bid her farewell. She summarized Sister’s life and ministry, and added:

Sister’s family had visited with her ... as she grew progressively weaker and quieter. She died peacefully ... with Sister Roberta at her side, as well as myself and Sister Mary Miday. Her niece Julie was also close by in Regina and came quickly to be with her as well. Her friends, crowd members, and Mission Group members had been rotating the vigil for two nights.

Short, loving messages were brought from members of Sister Bettina’s crowd and other friends. They were read at the wake by Sister Virginia King. Those who sent messages were Sisters Mary Sue Kennedy, Joyce Caulfield, and Rosa Monique Pena. Other friends who sent testimonials were Melody Duffy, Ellen Beauchamp, Mary Levack Quick, Elaine Gaston, Maureen Tobin Bastedenbeck, and Donna Boutilier Doone.

Sister Roberta Miller spoke of Sister Bettina’s African experiences:

Sister Bettina had three African experiences: 2000 to South Africa, 2007 and 2009 to Kenya. Each was a “hello” to peoples and cultures.

In that time, she was about three months in Kenya where she connected with the Dominican friars and student brothers—quickly learning their names; the OP nuns at Corpus Christi Monastery in Karen; the Assumption Sisters of Nairobi; and, lastly, with African sisters from various African congregations studying at Chemchemi, Karen. In being with them, and through her workshops in the formative spirituality of Adrian Van Kaam, Sister Bettina entered into their lives and loved them.

Her monastic experience was all-encompassing as she entered into their monastic routine of prayer, study, work, and recreation. She gave them a three-week workshop in the formative spirituality of Adrian Van Kaam, observing, listening, dialoging with them—professed, novices, and postulants.

In 2009 Sister Bettina again traveled to Karen, Kenya, to the study and renewal institute of Chemchemi, where she gave her workshop in formative spirituality to African sisters, who passed the word on to their superiors—of how much they received from her. While at Chemchemi, she became good friends with one of the faculty and directors, Sister Olivia, who happened to have a bad hip. Much walking was involved for her. When Sister Bettina returned to Columbus, she utilized her connections ... for Sister Olivia to have hip replacement surgery and rehabilitation through the Mount Carmel Hospital chain. Sister Olivia resided in the Columbus Motherhouse of the Peace Congregation for her five-plus months of recovery—a gift for all concerned.

Sister's niece, Julie DuVall, spoke lovingly of her aunt.

Aunt Bettina was my godmother. She had likes and dislikes. She had strong beliefs and even stronger opinions. She was kind and critical. She had a wicked sense of humor, but was also reflective. Prayers were important, actions spoke louder. ... To quote my husband, "Sister Bettina was the strongest person I have ever known."

The family has known cancer, this awful disease, this enemy of life. Each affected member of our family has battled to a different victory. Sister Bettina fought four battles over ten years. She won three of them. An Army General would be proud of that record. But Sister Bettina was more like a Marine. She didn't want to win just the battle; she wanted to win the war. She was given many choices during her life: community and family; travel and home. She managed them all. She was generous, but only a few knew how very generous she was. Aside from her battles with cancer and pillows, she was a happy and, I believe, content person. She chose to soldier on, but she did lose her last battle.

And when she gets to heaven

To St. Peter she will tell:

"One more cancer Marine reporting, sir,

I've served my time in hell."

Sister Bettina's funeral liturgy took place on May 20. Father James Hug, SJ, Motherhouse Chaplain, was the presider, and Sister Mary Sue Kennedy gave the beautiful homily. She said in part:

[Sister Bettina] gave life to so many through her ministry of service as an educator, preacher, campus minister, presenter of workshops, and courses on formative spirituality. ... God was her foundation and she had a very special relationship with Him. She no longer has to contend with cancer and the anxieties that accompanied this disease. ... Her intense passion, her strong feelings, her sense of loyalty, her courage, her love for people where she found God, her dry, witty sense of humor all enter eternity with her, for these wonderful traits were who she was.

It was just two weeks ago that she arrived here, and shortly after that was given hope that more treatment would be helpful, only to find out such a short time later that nothing more could be done. This was difficult for her to hear. ... She wasn't ready to let go but learned to live with this in her final hours as she, once again, said "yes" to our God.

We say "farewell" to Sister Bettina, knowing that God has given her a wonderful new life. And in that we rejoice with her.