

Sisters of Social Service

Rooted in the social teachings of the Church, we are sent to be pioneers



Celebrating nearly 90 years of working
with and supporting people on the
margins of our world through social
services and advocacy

Remembering Sister Bertille

by Jamey Fitzpatrick, Development Director and friend

With additions by Sr. Deborah Lorentz, SSS



“Pray and Work that God may be glorified in all things.”

Sister Bertille Prus, SSS

April 4, 1919 – August 13, 2016

Sister Bertille Prus, SSS, passed into God’s loving hands and eternal life on August 13, 2016 at the age of 97. She was born in Portland, Oregon, and grew up in a close-knit family of seven siblings - two boys and five girls. Even as a youngster, she was an avid storyteller. Her mischievous smile and sparkle were infectious – and her quick wit served her well as she grew older.

After high school, she was called to religious life and entered the Sisters of Social Service novitiate in Los Angeles in 1938, where her sister, Sr. Elizabeth Prus, SSS, was already a part of the community. Sr. Bertille received her B.A. from Immaculate Heart College in 1944 and her M.S.W. from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. in 1950. She made her first

vows on May 24, 1942 and her final vows on June 1, 1952, adopting the motto, “Pray and Work that God may be glorified in all things.”

Her strong sense of purpose, deep family roots and her faith provided an excellent foundation for her social work education and ministries that followed in Northern and Southern California. Indeed, family was at the core of her life and her ministries. She and Sr. Elizabeth regularly visited relatives in Portland, traveled with family when it was possible and attended family reunions. She delighted in any time she could talk with or visit family or friends – and even learned to use Skype in her nineties to connect more easily with her sister, Bea.

Her early ministry work included family visits and group work, and supporting families as a caseworker with L.A. Catholic Welfare Bureau. She spent time working with troubled teens at Stanford Home, and several years with Catholic Social Service in Vallejo and San Rafael.



Sr. Bertille Prus (standing right) next to her Aunt Kate, Sr. Elizabeth Prus (seated), Portland, Oregon visit, 1938



An early photo as Holy Family Adoptive Services began their international work – Sr. Bertille holds a Vietnamese baby awaiting a home, 1975

Along with several other Sisters in the SSS Community, Sr. Bertille was involved with relocation and resettlement efforts through ***Catholic Charities of Los Angeles***. Beginning with the North Korean, Cambodian and Vietnamese diaspora, Catholic Charities and other organizations helped families and individuals with immediate and long-term needs as they first entered the U.S.

SSS Sisters **Georgianna Cahill, Susan Kam, Bertille Prus, Paula Vandagear** and others, were honored to accompany these brave human beings as they began their lives again in the U.S. They helped provide the new immigrants with basic food, shelter and other essentials, and as they acclimated, offered them educational programs, work training and citizenship classes, as they rebuilt their personal and professional lives again.

When Sr. Bertille began her work with ***Holy Family Adoptive Services*** in 1963, many say she found her true life's work. For three decades, she was the Executive Director of Holy Family. During her tenure there, she advocated on the local and systemic level to create best practices for all involved in the adoption process. She not only embraced the vast changes within her field, but served as a vital catalyst to better serve families involved in the adoption process – adoptive parents as well as birth parents.

Sr. Bertille was looked to as a trusted leader within her field - in collaborations with Los Angeles County, in legislative efforts in both L.A. and Sacramento and within Holy Family. She helped develop new programs such as international adoptions, post-delivery and post-

adoption counseling, special needs adoptions, search assistance and a birth parent medical fund. She was a founding member of the California Association of Adoption Agencies.

Sr. Bertille was directly responsible for seeing the placement of more than 5,000 babies into loving, caring homes during her years at Holy Family. She also counseled families on both sides of adoptions - long before that was standard practice. She embraced staff, volunteers, clients and board members alike with her trust, insights and a sense of family comradery. When describing Sr. Bertille, a parent shared that she **“walked beside the young, the old, the great, the small, the rich and the poor, embracing each as a friend.”**

In addition to her ministry work, Sr. Bertille served on the leadership council of the Sisters of Social Service from 1982-1986. Sr. Bertille brought a steadfast heart and deep loyalty to the Sisters of Social Service and was always willing to meet the needs of her community. Her wit and zest for life will be deeply missed by her beautiful family, the SSS Community and staff, and all whose lives she touched.



Sr. Bertille at a 2013 reunion with Holy Family staff members

Sr. Bertille in recent years visiting (l-r) with her family, SSS Associates, and working in the garden with friends



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