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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Sister Virginia Sebert, SSND**

June 29, 1926 – March 4, 2018



WILTON, Conn. - Sister Virginia Sebert, 92, died at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, Conn., during the early morning of March 4, 2018. She was a professed member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for 72 years. As provincial leader of the Wilton Province, from 1973 to 1977, Sister Virginia Sebert was known for her “remarkably even temperament and playful sense of humor.” These qualities had been characteristic of her since her entrance into the Aspiranture at Holy Angels, Fort Lee, N.J., in September 1939. Sister Virginia always responded to all her “obediencies” during her religious life with great love for her vocation and for Our Lady. On her memorial card, she requested that a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help be placed instead of her own picture.

Virginia Mary was born on June 29, 1926, in East New York, N.Y., the fourth child of Hugo Sebert and Jennie Fritsch, immigrants from Germany and Hungary, respectively. She completed a family of brothers, George and Anthony, and a sister, Emma. All attended St. Anselm School in Brooklyn, N.Y., a mission of SSND, where Virginia was “deeply impressed by the life of the sisters.” During eighth grade she visited the Juniorate at Fort Lee, and her desire to prepare to become a sister intensified. Four high school years there led to August 1943 when she received the bonnet at St. Anselm Church and entered the Candidature at the Aisquith Street Motherhouse in Baltimore.

Virginia received the name Benedict Joseph when she entered the novitiate on July 16, 1945; she made first vows on July 31, 1946, after which she taught for a few months at St. Mary School in Bryantown, Maryland, and then for five years at St. Teresa, Washington, D.C. During the next 11 years, three missions in Puerto Rico were the scenes of her ministry as teacher and principal: Puerta da Tierra, Aguas Buenas, and Miramar. Just before going to the Island, Sister Benedict Joseph had made final profession on July 31, 1952, in Baltimore. Puerto Rico always held a very dear place in her heart and memories.

Sister Virginia received the Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the College of the Sacred Heart in Santurce, Puerto Rico. Later, she earned two Master of Arts degrees, one in English from Seton Hall University, and another in Administration from Fairfield University.

In August 1963, Sister Benedict Joseph was appointed director of Temporary Professed Sisters at the Wilton Motherhouse by Mother Paschal. Her optimistic spirit pervaded the atmosphere of initial formation as she collaborated with Novice Directress Charitas Maloney and Postulant Directress Patricia Marie Griffin. The three studied together and dialogued about the new norms and changed atmosphere for religious formation, as they came from Vatican Council II, and began to put them into practice at Wilton. All three were far-seeing and appreciative of the freer vision of the human person, and open to an introduction to religious life that deemphasized conformity. Together they changed the vision of the term “Formation” to “Personal Development in Community.” Sister Benedict Joseph, particularly, fostered a sense of freedom that allowed the young sisters to become their truest selves. To this day, they consider themselves “lucky” to have had her.

Virginia, as she now chose to be called, began to study at Fordham University and to teach at the College of Notre Dame of Wilton, which was being founded at that time. From 1971 to 1973, she joined Sister M. Petronilla Killigrew and the second provincial council when she was elected to complete the term of Sister M. Melita Ryan who had resigned to care for her mother. Sister Virginia’s responsibility on this council was to lead its effort to “withdraw from some schools in order to strengthen others.” It was a difficult and sensitive task that she carried out very well.

The delegates to the next provincial election, May 1973, chose her as provincial leader with councilors Barbara Dewey, for apostolate; Anne Ward and Patricia Marie Griffin, community; and Kay O'Connell, spirituality. Although chosen for specifically designed roles, the councilors worked as a truly collaborative "team" with Virginia, and enjoyed living together in the provincial house. The council at that time still felt responsible for appointing principals and teachers to schools for which the province had been committed; this effort became increasingly impossible to maintain. When long days of meetings ended on late Friday afternoons, Sister Virginia often went to New York to be with her dear friend from childhood, Sister Marie (Dolly) Todaro. They loved to walk the streets of New York together on Saturdays. Since 1939 they had made a trio of close friends with Sister Adria Turrill.

"Convergence I" and "Convergence II," held from 1973 to 1975, called every sister in the province to come together twice for weekends (at Wilton or retreat houses) to get to know each other better and to hear and dialogue intensively about the rapidly arriving changes in religious life that were emanating from *Perfectae Caritatis*, Vatican Council's address to religious. These weekends, held over two years, were a major effort of the council's ministry. The whole four years of this council's term was an effort to cope with "the signs of the times." Sister Virginia was an exceptionally patient, open, and loving leader.

Sister Virginia returned to the ministry of education in Catholic schools from 1977 to 2003, and served as principal at Madonna School in Fort Lee, N.J., and Holy Name of Jesus in Providence, R.I., along with teaching for nine years at Our Lady of the Visitation in Paramus, N.J. In 2003, she was living in Lodi, N.J., and typically ministering to the elderly in her neighborhood. In 2005 she came to Wilton.

A Mass of Christian Burial was presided over by Father Thomas Elliott, Villa chaplain, the following morning. Led by Sister Janice Algie carrying the pall, four former provincials of the Wilton Province placed it on the casket: Sisters Kay O'Connell, Barbara Valuckas, Jeannette Blatz, and Mary Maher. Sister Celine Marie Flynn, Fortunata Barbara, and Sister Claire Lo Maglio served as readers. Burial took place at St. Mary Cemetery, Bethel, Connecticut.

Memorial contributions may be made to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic Midwest Province, c/o Development Office, 345 Belden Hill Road, Wilton, Conn. 06897 or online: [www.amssnd.org](http://www.amssnd.org)

