

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Rita Sonderman

(Sister Mary Hilda)

BORN: November 1916

ENTERED CONGREGATION: August 14, 1938

DIED: December 31, 2009

WELCOME to the celebration of Sister Mary Rita's resurrection liturgy. We are especially grateful for the presence of her sister, Lucille, her nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

Just a little over 93 years ago Mary Rita, the second daughter of three, was born to William and Veronica (Recker) Sonderman of Fort Recovery, Ohio. Her sister, Helen, has preceded Rita into heaven.

Rita's family attended Mary Help of Christians Parish in Fort Recovery. This is also where Rita spent her grade school years, became acquainted with the Sisters of the Precious Blood and grew in her faith.

On Aug. 14, 1938, at the age of 21, Rita entered the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Rita expressed her reason for entering religious life like this: "First of all, (it was) a response to a call. Doing God's will was important in the lives of my good parents; their example, too, of devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Precious Blood made being a member of CPPS just the right thing to do." She in turn may have been influential in the vocations of her nephew, Precious Blood Father Bill Nordenbrock, and her cousin, Father Elmer Wurth, a Maryknoll Missioner.

Educational opportunities were always welcomed by Rita. After obtaining her bachelor of science in education degree from the University of Dayton and becoming a certified catechist, she took advantage of numerous workshops to keep current in educational and religious areas.

For 36 years Sister Rita ministered in elementary education, in Fort Wayne, Bryant and Rensselaer, Ind.; Linton, N.D.; and in Ohio in Dayton, North College Hill, Versailles, Ottoville, New Riegel and Wapakoneta. In addition to teaching, Sister Rita served as assistant aspirancy directress for four years; engaged in catechetical ministry in St. Henry, Ohio; and served in pastoral care, the latter at St. Theresa Home in Cincinnati.

It is no secret that Sister Rita was dearly loved. Recalling her aspirancy days, a sister says, "Under the guidance of Sister Rita, we had the best of instructions." Another sister recounts, "I am now living with Sister Rita for the third time and each time I have been 'touched by an angel'!" Another friend remembers that when Sister Rita visited the homebound she would always take some fresh baked cookies or flowers to lift their spirits and then she fed their hearts with faith, love and encouragement. Her mantra was, "God, your loving care, showered on me, must flow to others."

When Sister Rita came to Salem

Heights to retire, she found ways to continue to spread God's love by organizing exercise classes; planning and leading prayer services; serving as lector, Communion distributor and server during liturgical celebrations; and participating in book discussions. However, she was most in demand for pedicure services, which she learned from [the late] Sister Mary Joseph Nufer. After being treated by Sister Rita, the sisters claimed they felt like they were walking on clouds. Rita was also a member of the International Institute of Reflexology.

Sister Rosella Hess wrote this about Sister Rita, "...She has grown into finding a way to answer any request for help without hesitation and with apparent ease. [That] every service is a gift from God to be rendered to others seems to echo from Sister Rita's life."

Just as many years ago a sister felt that she was touched by an angel, we who visited Sister Rita during the last few days of her life seemed to see an angel lying before us. Such was her countenance. "Death did not extinguish a light, it put out a lamp because dawn had come" (paraphrased from Rabindranath Tagore).

Sister Rita, rest in God's love!

—Sister Madonna Ratermann