

Sister M. Charles Allen, CSC

(Alma Madelon Reynolds)

May 18, 1933 – September 21, 2023

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Karla McKinnie, CSC, using Sister Charles Allen's autobiography. Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, read them at Sister Charles Allen's funeral on October 10, 2023.

Alma Madelon Reynolds was born in Danville, Illinois, on her mother's birthday, May 18, 1933. She preferred to be called Madelon because her mother was named Alma. She was the second child of her parents, Mary Alma and James Allen Reynolds. She had two brothers, James and Jon. She remains close to her niece Ann and her nephew Jon and his family. She loved to have them come so that she could hold her grandnephew, Willy. In fact, she was hesitant to die because she wanted to see the baby one more time when the family came at Christmastime.

As a small child she was very independent. She related a vivid memory of her father trying to help her into her highchair. She kept pushing him away and saying, "Do it myself! Help me help myself." It was a struggle for her to let others help her. On Easter, early in her formation as a Holy Cross sister she watched Mother M. Rose Elizabeth (Havican) serving at table. She was in agony watching her serve others. Then in her mind she saw Peter pushing Jesus away as Jesus attempted to wash his feet. This was her first important insight into what she needed to have happen in her.

Madelon's father owned and operated a paint shop. He was also a member of the National Guard and was called to service two years before the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. The family was able to visit him at Camp Perry, near Cleveland, Ohio. While her father was involved in training exercises during the day, they went to the beach on Lake Erie. Her father was shipped overseas after officers training. They did not see him until the end of the war in 1945.

Her mother bought a large home closer to the downtown area. The house had been divided into four apartments. They lived in one. Her mother set up the Blueprint Shop in another, and two of the apartments were rented out. The family spent many hours in the shop. Her mother ran the business; her older brother assisted, and Madelon helped by caring for her baby brother, Jon.

In spite of her father's absence, it was a happy time for Madelon. They walked to her Grandma Reynolds' house each Sunday for dinner. Her mother would read to the children. Madelon especially loved Freckles and the Limberlost series by Gene Stratton Porter. Those books sparked her imagination so that her backyard became a jungle, or the scene of a lumberjack's adventures.

Madelon attended public school in Danville for her elementary grades. When she was in sixth grade her father returned. Her mother received a telegram that simply said, "Kill the fatted calf!" She said it was heaven on earth when he finally arrived home.

When Madelon was in seventh grade, her Grandmother Baily came to live with the family. She told Madelon about a new Catholic high school being built in Danville. The eighth-grade teacher, who was a Catholic, encouraged all her students to attend their own churches on Sunday. Up until that time Madelon's family did not attend church. One Sunday she went to a potluck supper at a Methodist Church. Afterwards, her mother said, "If you are going to a church, go to a Catholic Church. That is where you were baptized."

It had to be sheer grace that at age 14 she knew she wanted something more in her life. She wanted to go to church. She was amazed that she was drawn to church. She met with her pastor for instructions, and in June of that year she made her First Communion. She wanted to go to Schlarman, the new Catholic High School. The family had a conversation and, eventually, her parents agreed that she could go. Years later, her mother told her of a conversation with her father at the time. He had been concerned about the school being accredited and asked the question, "What if she wants to be a nun?"

So, she began her high school education at Schlarman. The first Holy Cross sister she met was Sister Dorothy Anne Cahill, who wore a habit and loafers! She loved her on sight. Often that year, Sister Dorothy Anne asked the students to pray for her so she could go back East to teach. Although Madelon prayed for her, this was very hard because it meant that she would leave Schlarman. She loved all the sisters and knew when she started school that she wanted to be a sister.

After graduation in June of 1951, she entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross in September. On August 5, 1952, she received the habit and the religious name, Sister Charles Allen. Charles was in honor of her pastor, Father Charles Motsett, and Allen, in honor of her father. She took her first vows on August 15, 1954. It was the beginning of her ministry in Holy Cross. She had many assignments in schools throughout the Midwest. She had one special adventure when she was assigned to St. Cyril Parish School in Tucson, Arizona. She got to experience the desert, and see the mountains and spectacular sunsets.

She pursued a graduate degree in aesthetic education at Northeast Missouri University, attending summer sessions while still teaching. In 1971 she was called to serve the community on the Midwest Administrative Council. She had the position of treasurer for a four-year term, putting her graduate studies on hold. After that assignment she was given a year off to study and complete her degree. In 1977 she was assigned to St. Paul's in Danville, Illinois, to teach art. This was where she grew up and where her father still lived. Her father was aging, and she needed to live close to him. Her father would come and help in the classroom. While teaching art, she had many art shows to display the children's art. She was proud to show pictures of the shows, even recently.

In 1992 the last sister left the convent in Danville and Sister Charles Allen moved into her own place. She began to help with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program at the parish. This sparked an interest in her for working with adults in the area of spirituality. She received permission from her superiors and the pastor, who was very supportive, to

change her ministry from teaching children to teaching and ministering to adults. Although her primary work was with RCIA, she visited parishioners who were in the hospital, served as a spiritual companion and gave talks when invited to do so.

She spent six summers at Creighton University earning a master's degree in spirituality. This was beneficial in her work in spiritual direction. Sister Charles Allen received the papal medal Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice from Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 as a result of her many years of service to the people of Danville in spirituality.

In December of 2004 her father died. She felt that her presence and ability to keep him involved contributed to his longevity of 98 years. For this she was grateful.

She moved to Saint Mary's in June of 2010, where she served as pastoral associate, visiting the sisters and getting to know them. From 2014 through 2018, she served as part of a team tasked with rekindling the spiritual care programs for the sisters at Saint Mary's, Rosary, and Augusta convents. One of her joys was working with the novices in the International Novitiate. Sisters found her to be a joyful person who loved to visit and share her creative artistic ability. She remained active in spite of her health issues, attending any planned event. In her final years she gracefully accepted her declining health without complaint. She was filled with gratitude: grateful for her call to Holy Cross, grateful for her ability to respond to the call, grateful for her life as a Holy Cross Sister, and grateful to be at Saint Mary's.

Even though she could not hold Willy again, she will surely remain connected to him and his family from heaven. She will be greatly missed by all who experienced her positive, joyful spirit.