

Memento for Sister Colette Marie, CSC

February 14, 1925 - December 20, 2018

These memories were shared by Sister Grace Shonk, CSC, at the funeral on December 28, 2018.

Ruth Josephine Lang, the future Sister Colette Marie, was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1925 becoming the fourth child of Anna Fagan Lang and Joseph Lang. Her father, Joseph, died six years after her birth in 1931 leaving her mother, Anna, with the challenging task of providing for a family of five children. Her mother lived until 1967. Her brothers, Emmitt and Robert are deceased, as well as her sister Jane, while her younger sister Helen is with us today. She grew up in a loving family attending several different Catholic grade schools in Columbus, completing public high school in 1943. Following graduation, she obtained employment at the Ohio Farm Bureau Auto Insurance Company in a Columbus suburb serving there as a secretary for more than five years until 1949 when she entered the Congregation.

The path that led Ruth to the Sisters of the Holy Cross is unclear. We know that in December 1948 she sent a letter to the Mother General of the Congregation asking for admission to the novitiate with the next group of novices scheduled for late January 1949. In the letter, she referred to a visit she had made to Saint Mary's in the summer of 1947. At that time, she spoke with Mother M. Regina (Kavanaugh), novice directress, about entering the Novitiate. A year and a half later, she made a formal request and was eager to enter as soon as possible, despite the rush that would be required to complete her application. Mother M. Constantine (Ryan), Eastern Provincial, asked her to visit the sisters at Mount Carmel Hospital in Columbus for assistance with the process. Ruth spoke of her reliance upon the prayers of Mary, Mother of God, as she dealt with the concerns that this change in the direction of her life caused. One can perceive an urgent need on her part to respond to God's call to pursue what she called "a better way of life." This was the time for her to part from her beloved family and to go into the unknown.

Sister Colette Marie entered the Congregation on January 30, 1949. She made her first profession of vows on August 15, 1951, and her final profession on August 15, 1954. Her career as an elementary school teacher began in the fall of 1950 when she was missioned to St. Peter's School in Washington,

D.C., as a second-grade teacher. Through summers of study, she earned a BA in Elementary Education from Dunbarton College in Washington, D.C., and a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from Loyola University in Baltimore, Maryland.

Sister Colette Marie served as an elementary teacher in diocesan schools located in Washington, D.C; Alexandria, Virginia; Batavia, New York; Austin and McAllen, Texas; Greenbelt, Maryland; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Bethesda, Maryland. She was a principal in the diocese of Washington, D.C., at two different schools during her career. When she began her ministry as a teacher, her considerable talents for the education of first- and second-grade students became apparent to those who worked with her. The love she had for her students and her ability to instruct them in the basics so needed for their future educational development brought a return of affection and appreciation from them.

She spent countless hours outside the classroom meeting with students to prepare them for the celebration of their first Communion. One of her many gifts was her artistic ability which she used effectively in classroom instruction and preparation for the sacraments. An example that was shared with me involved a class preparing for first Communion. She asked the family of each child to take a square of cloth and place on it a symbol of what the Eucharist meant to them. The squares were then sewed together to form a banner. This project also illustrates how she reached out to parents and obtained their support.

Sister Colette Marie never confined her interests to the school but was active in parish life and ministry. Some of the ways in which she involved herself include membership in the Parish Liturgy Committee, coordination of eucharistic ministers, moderating the parish teen club, serving as a eucharistic minister to the home-bound, and fund-raising activities for the needy. She supported and entered into all aspects of parish life. She remains much loved by many families and has a number of godchildren.

The sisters with whom she has lived speak fondly of her. Many of them have preceded her to God including her close friend, Sister Miriam Regina Brosnan. Sisters who have known her well over the years have shared the following comments: She was a private person and a pleasure to live with, always welcoming. She had a great sense of humor and enjoyed a good

time. She loved nature and all of God's creation, especially animals. She had a number of pets throughout her life in community including a hamster, a parakeet, and gerbils. As you can imagine, the gerbils were not popular with the sisters on the occasions when they got loose in the convent. One time the gerbils died and Sister Colette Marie enticed some of the sisters to participate in a proper burial service. She also used her considerable artistic talent to teach her students how to draw various animals. Singing aloud gave her great joy. She loved music, especially the 1940's era popular tunes and liturgical music. When the sisters got into a car to go somewhere she would always start a song, such as "You are My Sunshine." She enjoyed old movies, religious broadcasts, and news shows on television. She liked to cook and enjoyed good food. At times, she liked to experiment with new dishes which were not always popular with the recipients. Some of her favorite foods included chocolate, Klondike bars, and cheese crackers. Another characteristic was the enthusiasm with which she participated in local community and Congregational meetings and celebrations. She was ready to join a decorating committee or to participate in any way needed.

Then came the sad day in June of 2008, when Sister Colette Marie experienced a health incident that moved her into a new ministry that lasted more than ten years. At the time, she was serving in Our Lady of Lourdes Grade School in Bethesda, Maryland, and living at Saint Angela Hall. Since her retirement from teaching in 2001, she had remained active at the school volunteering as a coordinator of the religion program and assisting students who needed academic help. She understood and accepted that the move to Saint Mary's was necessary, but she deeply felt the loss of contact with the school community and her many friends. The numerous messages and cards she has continued to receive during her years at Saint Mary's show the loss was reciprocal. Although she could no longer express herself verbally, she always responded to visitors and caregivers with a welcoming smile. She continued to show forth her love for others and inspire them by her cheerful acceptance of her physical condition. All who have known her during these years have been nourished spiritually by their association with her. Her family has remained close to her and she to them. There have been frequent interactions through visits, Skyping on the computer and phone calls to her from family members, including a weekly call from her nephew Jim.

Tricia McGann, Principal of Our Lady of Lourdes School at the time of her stroke wrote the following about her: “Sister Colette Marie’s gentle nature, sense of humor, incredible patience and her genuine love of the Catholic faith were the gifts she shared with the children and the faculty.”

Sister Colette Marie would want me to conclude with an expression of her love and gratitude to her family, her friends and her caregivers. All those who have been a part of her life will continue to receive her prayers of love and support from her new home as she sings her songs of joy and praise.