



## SISTER MARY CALLISTA McCHESNEY

June 28, 1912 — July 15, 2007

*Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, comfort the sick and the dying, visit those in prison. Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, you do to Me.*

~~~~~ This is how I remember Sister Callista.

On July 7, 1912, in Saint Joseph Church, Sharpsburg, PA, Mary Elizabeth McChesney, daughter of John and Elizabeth Kotchey McChesney, was bathed in the waters of Baptism. Her siblings were 2 brothers, Joseph and Thomas, and 2 sisters, Anna and Elizabeth. Although all have preceded Mary into eternity, many nieces, nephews and cousins are the family of Aunt Sister Mary.

In due time Mary attended the parish school where she was taught by the Sisters of Charity. After graduating from high school, Mary worked first as a store clerk and then as a telephone operator. Can't you just picture the smiling young clerk behind the counter, eager to please each customer, or hear the friendly voice calling, "Number, please"?

When Mary applied to enter the Sisters of Charity at Seton Hill, Father Amend wrote in his letter of recommendation, "Mary Elizabeth McChesney is an exemplary Catholic young lady, receives the Sacraments frequently and will make a very good member of your order." How right he was!

On February 2, 1931, Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Elizabeth entered the community at Seton Hill, and at the completion of her postulancy, was given the name Sister Mary Callista. Following her canonical year, Sister Mary Callista spent several decades teaching the lower grades in parish schools in Sheraden, Crafton, Oakmont, Apollo, and Swissvale in Pennsylvania and in California, Arizona and Maryland. On each mission, Sister Callista no doubt taught catechism to public school pupils on weekends or after school. Can you imagine how many children Sister Callista prepared for the Sacraments of Penance and First Eucharist?

Sister Mary Callista was a "people person." She knew and cared about, not only her pupils, but all the parishioners and members of the larger community. She listened to their stories, she prayed for their special intentions and on occasion visited the sick in their homes or in hospitals; she consoled them at the loss of a loved one. Sister had a special love for her family: nieces and nephews, grandnieces and nephews and cousins. We knew many of you at least by name. And we rejoiced with this great-aunt when Baby Gabriel arrived on the scene not long ago.

Assigned to work in the Huntingdon area in 1968, the scope of Sister's ministry widened. In addition to teaching religion classes in several small parishes, Sister Callista visited patients in the local hospital, at times reading to them, or helping with crafts: braiding rugs, making holiday decorations, dressing dolls – whatever might add brightness and busyness to an otherwise long

and dull day. “I’ve never known anyone quite like Sister Callista” said one patient, “she’s so lovely and kind to each of us.” By the time Sister Callista was ready to leave Huntingdon, she had organized a craft program involving volunteers and some college students which was being adopted by another facility in the area.

In 1975, while living in Huntingdon, Sister experienced what she called the greatest moment of her life: traveling to Rome for the canonization of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and receiving Holy Communion from the Holy Father.

From Huntingdon, this generous and creative lady was appointed the coordinator at the Greensburg Faculty House. Again her diligent and joyous spirit prevailed. All were welcome, especially the priests who came every morning for Mass and those who taught in the high school. She loved to prepare tasty meals, delicious desserts and to have parties, creatively planning dinners and decorations.

At the end of her term at the faculty house, Sister Callista was sent as a volunteer in the school at Mount Pleasant. She had time to pursue her love of crafts, nurture plants, dry flowers. She joined the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, helping in their prayers and works of charity, delighting in the camaraderie at their regular breakfast meetings. The craftwork continued at Connellsville and her return to Greensburg. Both in Huntingdon and during her retirement at Caritas Christi, Sister Callista won awards for her crafts. The blue ribbons hung on the door on her bedroom. It was while retired at Caritas Christi that Sister Callista became a member of the Red Hat Society.

Where did this special sister and aunt get her wisdom and energy?

Remember the story we heard last night about a rosary to match every outfit? They were not accessories. She prayed. She also spent much time in the chapel, praying before the Blessed Sacrament.

The other day I said to Sister Reynita, “Sister Callista told me she wanted to die before you.” To which her dear friend replied, “I’m glad she went first. She was a great prayer and she’ll pray for me.”

Mary Elizabeth, Mary, Sister Callista, Aunt Sister Mary, Red Hatter, we’re happy you have gone to your reward. We ask you to pray for us.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection  
Sister Francis de Sales Joyce, SC  
July 18, 2007*