



SISTER M. SABINA McGINLEY
August 30, 1914 - September 8, 2005

Did you hear the joke about . . .? Or the one about . . .? How often many of us in this chapel tonight recall such lines chuckled by the woman who must have remembered every joke she ever heard—and every punch line.

Truly, can we think about our Sister Sabina without smiling?

She loved her jokes; she loved to laugh and make others laugh. We shared many of these stories at last night's Vigil. This evening, perhaps, we could focus our prayer and thanks for Sabina's life on some of the other characteristics that were so naturally complemented by her undying sense of humor.

If I were to find one adjective by which I would describe Sabina, it would be the simple word **real**—or as Sister Sara Louise said last evening, **wholesome**. I first “discovered” Sabina, the wholesome and real Sabina, when we lived at Sacred Heart in Pittsburgh in the early seventies. Like 1970 . . . the year our community gave us choices: continue to wear some form of religious habit or wear ordinary clothes; the year when large houses like Sacred Heart had choices: to live as one large community of many sisters or to form small groups within the larger community. Sabina continued to wear traditional religious garb; many of us wore regular clothes. Sabina chose to be part of the large community; six of us chose to form a small group within the larger one. It was amazing to me how accepting Sabina was of the choices many of us made that I'm sure were not what she was hoping for or what she thought should be for religious sisters. Well, maybe she wasn't really accepting of these choices we made, but what mattered more, she was accepting of those who made the choices that were different than hers.

One sister tells about the day she went from the traditional black watchband to the more “worldly” silver expansion band. Sabina laughed in a way that communicated acceptance, and said to her younger friend, “Be careful now; that silver watch band could be the first step. . .” And we can guess at how the two of them teased when years later Sabina got an expansion band—silver too. Sabina, of course, was ever ready to laugh at herself.

And there is the sister on whom Sabina noticed dangling earrings. Sabina just pointed to her own ears and placed a question mark on her face. The sister, trusting Sabina's mode of acceptance, even when she saw things differently, smiled and asked Sabina, “Do they look nice?” Silence. Then Sabina smiled, “On you they do.”

Maybe it was more than acceptance we felt from Sabina; maybe it was a feeling that she really believed in us; that we, all of us, are okay . . . the way we probably envision God looking on us also.

Sabina was appreciative. Some sisters may remember the Ascension Thursday in 1985 when the new *Constitutions* were presented to us, the red books. A few days later a letter appeared at DePaul Center addressed to Sister Baptista and the Council.

Dear Sisters, I love the format, the size, the color, etc. of the new Constitutions. I am grateful to all who had any part in putting it all together. A few more sentences and signed, Lovingly, Sister M. Sabina.

Her parents, Anthony and Margaret Sullivan McGinley, came from County Mayo and County Galway. They settled in Hazelwood, the neighborhood the middle daughter of six children, Sabina Veronica, fondly called “the garden spot of the world.” Never one to just talk about what she loved, Sabina walked the talk. She contributed every year to the Saint Stephen walk-a-thon. And every year, she would prepare the sisters here at Caritas Christi that Sister Marie Clare would be coming soon to collect from them for the walk-a-thon. Sabina wanted them all to be ready—to help her school, Saint Stephen’s. It was there at Saint Stephen parish that the Sisters of Charity inspired Sabina’s vocation; she entered our community seventy-one years ago, March 25, 1934. She was twenty years old.

Sabina gave her life to teaching and administration in several western Pennsylvania elementary schools, (with three appearances at Saint Kieran’s; she was there right up to the day it closed its doors for the last time.)



No story of her life would be complete without recalling the first ten years of her retirement when she volunteered as the transportation manager at Seton Senior Center. Volunteer -- she was also the cashier, the record keeper, and the director of hospitality (who could do it better?) However, as always, it was not the work Sabina did that made the greatest impact—it was the human, loving, and entertaining person she was who touched the seniors’ hearts as she calmly carried out these many tasks. She didn’t seem to remember that she was the retired volunteer; she always claimed that she was helping the old people, never realizing that she was old herself. The seniors there fell in love with Sabina who greeted them with caring— “How’s your son doing?” Or your daughter, your grandchild? Your arthritis? Your shoulder?” She took to heart the worries of each of them. Predictably she often followed up her caring expressions with one of her “Did you hear the joke about . . .”

Sabina had said over the years that she wanted no fuss at her funeral. Coming out of her Irish heritage, she asked simply, “Just a wee prayer is all I want.” And we are here tonight to pray for her and with her in union with this Eucharist.

The question stands. “Have you heard the one about . . . the story about the Sister of Charity who lived the seventy one years of her religious life prayerfully, humbly, gratefully, often with a chuckle, always with a smile? We certainly have. We’ve been listening to that story for many years and in many places—times and places where Sister Sabina proudly served God and the Church as a joyful and faithful Sister of Charity.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Mary Clark
September 13, 2005*