



SISTER M. CORNELIA O'FRIEL
December 9, 1921 — May 17, 2006

At the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His Apostles, and He said to them: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

Sister Cornelia O'Friel understood this call to service and she answered it.

Her life is a testimony to these words of Jesus Christ—that we must serve others. In all that she did as daughter, sister, teacher, administrator, she put others first.

She was the fourth of nine children born to George and Lillian O'Friel in 1921. She attended Saint Leo's Elementary School and Altoona Catholic High School, graduating in 1938. She returned to the high school to pursue a two-year business course, and was then hired by Monsignor Patrick Harkins as the school secretary. She was paid \$10.00/week as secretary and she gave \$5.00 to her parents and spent the other \$5.00 on her brothers and sisters, an early example of her generosity as well as her devotion to her family.

Sister Cornelia (Virginia, to me as we were growing up), was scrupulously honest, even as a child. One day, the lady who lived next door to my parents asked Virginia if she would go to the corner store for her. Of course, Virginia said yes, and after returning with the groceries, the lady thanked her and said, "here is a quarter, buy some lollipops." First of all, a quarter was a lot of money in those days. So Virginia went to the store and came back with a rather large bag filled with lollipops. You see, she did exactly what the neighbor told her to do. She bought as many lollipops as she could with the quarter, and then immediately shared them with the whole neighborhood.

She entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill in 1944 and for the next 30 years she taught business education in high schools in Pittsburgh, Tucson and Altoona.

She earned a B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.A. from the Catholic University of America.

In 1970, she was called back to Seton Hill to become the Mistress of Novices, and later was assigned to be the administrator of Assumption Hall. In 1981, she returned to Altoona to become head of the business department at Bishop Guilfoyle High School, where she remained until her retirement.

She was an excellent example to my seven daughters. When my family would visit my parents in Altoona, my seven daughters would ask Sister Cornelia to play "stone teacher" with them. It was a typical children's game. It was played on the steps of the front porch, and the person in charge, Sister Cornelia, would have a stone hidden in one of her palms. The idea was to guess which hand the stone was in, and if you guessed correctly, you got to move up or down to the next step. Whoever got to the top or bottom first won the game. My seven daughters learned early to love "the stone teacher."

Sister spent her last years at Caritas Christi, where she again gave us an inspirational model to follow. In constant pain, she never complained. She suffered in silence and continued to do all she could to serve others in her community.

She was soft-spoken, patient, and well-educated. But even more than those qualities, it was her compassion and spirituality that shone through all her actions that guided her life of service to others.

Because of her great devotion to her God and His Mother, she also perfected the virtue of patience. From the moment she came to Caritas Christi with Sister Clementine, she waited and waited and waited to hear just two short sentences from her God: "Well done, O good and faithful servant. Come, share your Master's joy." She heard these words the other day, and instantaneously, her pain was gone, her osteoporosis disappeared, and with a body stronger than we can imagine, she flew to the side of her God and His Mother.

It is rare that we have a chance to live side by side with someone who so completely embodies the teachings of Christ. By her life's work, she reminded us every day how a life of service can transform the world, one neighbor, one student, one community at a time. By her compassion and dedication to others, she gave us a model, like Jesus Himself, that we can only hope to imitate.

In closing, I'd simply like to say, goodbye Virginia, hello Saint Sister Mary Cornelia.

Funeral Liturgy Reflection
George S. O'Friel, brother of Sister M. Cornelia
May 19, 2006