

SISTER M. CHRISTINA STOECKLEIN
September 28, 1924 – July 9, 2009

Good morning sisters, relatives and friends of Sister Christina Stoecklein. Today is a festival day in heaven as Christina joins her parents, brothers and sisters in a grand celebration of the life we all aspire to achieve. Giving this reflection is a rather difficult task because the stories during the wake service last evening were wonderful memories of Sister Christina which came from the hearts of those speaking. However, I will try to capture and summarize those stories.

Florence Rosina Stoecklein, daughter of Christian and Julia Thomas Stoecklein, was born September 28, 1924, the twelfth of fourteen children. She was baptized on October 19, 1924, in Saint Walburga's Church in the East End of Pittsburgh. She attended Saint Walburga's elementary school and Sacred Heart High School. In July of 1943, she prepared to enter the Sisters of Charity and her pastor wrote, "Florence Rosina Stoecklein, the daughter of honorable, Christian parents of this parish, has passed through the grade school of Saint Walburga and deserves to be admitted joyfully to any religious community as her conduct, efforts and morals show more than an ordinary vocation to religious life"

Florence came to the community on April 16, 1944, and at her reception she received the name Sister Christina. From her earliest days in the community, she exhibited a childlike, but not childish spirit. Perhaps it was the influence of her hard-working and successful parents who brought out in her the desire to want to help the world. Her father, and later her brothers, shared their bread with others in need. The Little Sisters of the Poor and many others depended upon them for help with the table.

In 1949, Sister Christina wrote to Mother Maria Benedict for permission to make perpetual vows, "I humbly petition to be admitted among the professed members of our community. I have been very happy as a Sister of Charity. My only desire is to be a true religious. With the help of our dear Lord, may I always remain faithful to our community."

In her active ministerial days in the community, Sister Christina taught first and second grade in a number of our parish schools. She was at Saint James, Wilkinsburg; Saint Stephen, Hazelwood; Resurrection, Brookline; Saint Anselm, Swissvale; Saint John the Baptist, Pittsburgh; Cathedral, Greensburg; and Immaculate Conception, Irwin. Since she was a large woman, one would wonder how the tiny first graders saw her. It seems they recognized her childlike spirit and kind face and smile and found a teacher they loved. Last evening just before the wake service, a young man arrived with his wife and two children. He told me Sister Christina was his first grade teacher. He said, "Last weekend was our parish festival and I took my daughter to see the classroom where Sister Christina taught me and I told her many stories. She was the BEST. I have only fond memories of Immaculate Conception, but she was my favorite."

Sister Christina herself said as she prepared to celebrate her 60th year in religious life, "I have wonderful memories of the delight children felt when they learned to read;" and "I loved preparing the little ones for their First Communion and Reconciliation."





Sister Christina is also a prominent figure from the Festival Days–1952 to 1982. Sister Christina joined in the excitement, the work, the ideas and gave and gave and gave. One can hardly think of the festival without remembering the bake sale or the pizza booth. It was Christina who first started the pizza booth or as Mother Claudia said “a piece of pie” when she could not understand the popularity of the booth. Once it was started Christina took up the bake sale booth and it flourished. People knew to go early to get Sister Leocadia’s pecan rolls and all of the wonderful homemade items. Sister Christina fussed and ordered and priced. She did all she could to make money for the community.

If Christina saw a need, a cause, an idea worth working on, she felt obliged to go into it with her entire self and that included all the persons she loved, influenced and touched. If there was a need for coupons to cut, she taught her students how to cut them out. If there were bread or rolls or bake goods needed, she expected that her brothers, and later her nephews, would supply them generously and freely. If devotion to the Infant of Prague was to be spread, her sisters and nieces would help her obtain the material and stitch, sew and dress hundreds of statues to be sold or given away. If the Christmas sales were to be a success, many items needed to be prepared. All of her sister friends, her nieces and their families would be called upon to cut out and paste, and only quality work was acceptable. Christina saw a need and in a kind and childlike way made one feel happy and actually privileged to help with the project.

As her health failed, Sister Christina found new ways to minister and did so by making crafts of many kinds and engaging as many helpers as she could gather among community, family and friends. In spite of pain, lack of energy, a constant battle with weight and lack of mobility, she never stopped nor did she let her sisters or her family stop meeting the needs as she saw them.

The Sisters of Charity have lost our crafter, our entrepreneur, our Chrissy, our friend, our ticket seller, our idea woman. The Stoeckleins have lost the last of a wonderful spirited generation, the matriarch who held a large family together by remembering names, birthdays, special occasions and loving each in a special way.

Throughout her life, bread was a significant symbol. Today, as we celebrate a life we cannot put into a few words, we know that it is festival day in heaven. “I received the living God and my heart is full of joy.” Jesus said, “I am the bread kneaded long to give you life, you who will partake of me need not ever fear to die.” and “I am the Way. And my Father longs for you; So, I come to bring you home to be one with him anew.”

Christina received the living God and her heart is full of joy. (1)

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Louise Grundish
July 14, 2009*