

Remembering



Sister Marie Chapla, CSJ

March 5, 1931 ~ September 16, 2016

Like both her parents, Cleta Rose was born in the mile high city of Denver. Her birthdate was March 5, 1931. Undoubtedly she inherited their Rocky Mountain energy for caring, sharing and accomplishing. The oldest of four children, Cleta, her one sister, Patricia, and brothers Peter, and Stephen, lived in various states including Colorado, Montana, Arizona, Northern and Southern California. She attended a total of nine grammar schools, and two high schools. They moved often, because this was the era of the Great Depression, when work was scarce. Her father, Peter Paul, was a general maintenance mechanic, and he had to go where the jobs were. Her mother, Nell or Nellie Constance Filkoski, became a single parent when he died at the age of 42. Nell was a strong factor in Cleta Rose's life. As the oldest child, Cleta worked for four years before entering. Her

work experience included box office cashier, clerk, then secretary to Business Manager of Chico State College, and eventually Secretary to the Vice President of the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Marie wrote, "I entered community from Boulder, Colorado where I was working and a member of the University of Colorado Newman Club. The chaplain helped me through the entrance discernment and paper work. I entered community sight unseen and without any paper work, bringing only my trunk full of supplies and clothing. I was 21 years old when I entered at old St. Mary's." She entered on Sept. 15, 1953, received the habit on March 19, 1954, and was given the religious name Sister Marie Stephen. As a second year novice the novitiate moved to the "hill". On March 19, 1956, Sister made first vows at Mount St. Mary's College chapel. On August 15, 1961, Sister

pronounced her final vows. In 1970 she shortened her name to Sister Marie. Sister celebrated her 60th Jubilee in 2014.

Marie enjoyed telling the story of how she began studies in Home Economics and Dietary. "Because I had belonged to 4H in high school, a superior thought I would be good in dietary. So I began studies in it."

She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in 1958 at Mount St. Mary's College, then went on to the University of California Los Angeles to earn a Master's Degree in Dietetics in 1960. Later Sister Marie was missioned to Daniel Freeman Hospital as Food Service Director and Chief Dietician for seven years. "Sister Marie ran a well organized Department, and the food was delicious," Sister Mary Frances Rebel said. Sister Mary Frances invited Sister Marie to consider going into hospital administration. She suggested trying it for a year. If she liked it she could begin studies. So for a year Sister was Assistant Administrator at St. Mary's Hospital in Tucson, working with Sister Julia Mary Farley. From there she attended St. Louis University and was granted a Master's Degree in Hospital Administration in 1970. Sister returned to Tucson and for ten years was Administrator at St. Mary's. The date of her installment was in September 1971, just eighteen years after she entered.

In 1986 Sister chose to study spirituality at Creighton University and received her Master's Degree in Spirituality. For ten years Sister ministered in Spiritual Direction and retreat work in Tucson working for the diocese, and at Picture Rocks Retreat Center and St. Odilia Parish.

Next, Sister was asked to serve as Vicar for Religious and Director of Education in the Diocese of Santa Rosa, CA. She then returned to Tucson and St. Odilia Parish to serve as the Pastoral Administrator. Her last ministry in Tucson was that of Pastoral Associate at St. Joseph Parish where she worked with Fr. John Alt who became a dear friend. Her previous experiences and skills served her well in this collaborative ministry. Her many years in the desert deepened her love of silence and solitude.

Marie's interests ranged from beautifully sewing her own clothes, water color painting, gardening, reading and quiet time in solitude. Feeding the homeless and jail ministry were special ministries she assumed over the years. On July 1, 2004 Sister joined the Sisters in Holy Family Community, where she assisted at the switchboard and attended most activities. She could often be found in the chapel.

Marie was known to be positive and upbeat, hopeful and flexible by those who worked with her. Her life was God centered, she was a woman of quiet faith and prayer. She seemed to have intuitive knowledge and insight into

people. Sister Marie had a charm of manner and was good natured. With her ability to organize there was a gentleness. Sister possessed deep wisdom and compassion. Hers was a silent heart, docile and trusting.

And now, dear Sister Marie, may you find yourself to be totally in the loving embrace of God whom you served so faithfully.

"For you alone my soul waits in silence, my hope is from the Beloved.

You are the Heart of my heart, my refuge is in the Silence."

Ps. 62 Nan C. Merrill

~ Written by Sister Frances Baker, CSJ

