

## Remembering Sister Paraclita Schnebelt, IHM

**March 5, 1919 – March 10, 2018**



In 1919, Sister Paraclita was one of twin daughters born to Joseph and Alice (Johnston) Schnebelt. There were 10 children: Irene and Lorene, Ruth, Audrey, Phyllis, Donald Eugene, Lawrence, Joseph and Philip. At the age of 24, her twin sister Lorene died.

Their father was from Huntington, Ind. and their mother was from Grand Rapids, Mich. Their father owned a bakery in Dexter, Mich. and the girls learned cake decorating and helped in the bakery. Mr. Schnebelt was very generous toward the sisters, supplying them with bread and coffee cake and other delicious treats from his bakery.

Irene graduated from St. Thomas, Ann Arbor, Mich. after attending school in Michigan and Florida. After attending Marygrove College for one year, she entered the IHM congregation in July 1938. She was attracted to the IHMs because they were good teachers and well educated. Lorene wanted to get married and have 12 children, Irene dearly wanted an education!

At her reception in 1939, Irene was given the name Paraclita which means “one who received the Holy Spirit as helper and comforter.”

Sister Paraclita earned a bachelor’s degree at Marygrove College and a Master of Arts degree from Marquette University in Milwaukee. She served as teacher, principal and counselor in several Michigan schools and she was well loved by her students. Sister Carol Quigley, IHM, put us in touch with some of her former students who shared the following:

“I believe she instilled in all she encountered the gift of the Holy Spirit for in her it burned bright! Throughout her mortal life, she quested for knowledge, reading anything, observing the world around her on daily walks with her dogs.” -Katherine Gaboury

“One thing I always remember, is the bulletin board above the blackboard where Sister would put a quote from Thomas Merton, Shakespeare, Teilhard de Chardin, Henri Nouwen and many others that were designed to make us think and to expose us to the philosophy, spirituality, and thoughts that would inspire and motivate us. I so looked forward to each new quote and would write it in my notebook to appreciate and refer back to.” -Jeni McLaughlin

Paraclita’s mother died in 1968; since then, she oversaw the care of her brother, Donald, who was mentally handicapped. Donald lived apart from Paraclita, but she watched over him closely. She always took him with her whenever she went on vacation – some 40 or more years! Donald died in 2010.

It was in 1972, that Paraclita moved to the area around Coldwater, Mich. and began ministry at St. Charles Parish as a counselor and home visitor. During 1972-1974, she ministered with the Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy in Ypsilanti, Mich. In 1975, she came home to Dexter where she became the director of religious education and pastoral minister at St. Joseph Parish. She led the Adult Education Program and assisted with the Worship Committee. She was instrumental in founding the 50-plus Friendship Club.

Retiring from active ministry in 1984, Sister Paraclita continued to devotedly serve the St. Joseph Parish family in many ways until 2001. She also wrote for the IHM publication, *Spinnaker*, for many years. In 1991, Sister was featured in the Washtenaw County United Way "Heart of Gold Awards."

"As a volunteer Sister Paraclita has volunteered her time to produce and edit our newsletter, designed brochures and wrote the complete history of our association's 41 years. Sister Schnebelt has served as a guardian for people with severe disabilities who do not have family."

In 2001, Paraclita moved to Clinton, Mich., where she lived with Sister Helen Walling, IHM, who remembered her as a good support person and a very private person; very loving with her brother Donald, patient, and kind, like a good shepherd.

At a celebration of her life, Paraclita wrote a beautiful reflection of gratitude in which she spoke of her sister Lorene, "my twin, identical to me, companion and friend par excellence, we shared dreams for 17 years. But her long illness and her death three weeks before my final vows took her from me." There were friends, "yes, but they were not my 'other Lorene'. I hadn't asked for another, but in these later years God gave me Helen Walling's friendship and I recognized her as gift – perhaps Lorene's gift."

Sister Paraclita was grateful for all her experiences. "It's been a wonderful life! I loved being a sister! I loved being a teacher! I loved being a counselor! I'm very grateful for the education the community has given me." She also appreciated her close relationship with God, a friendship that was very apparent to all.

Written and delivered by Sister Roberta Richmond, IHM, March 15, 2018