

**Remembering Sister Connie (Olivia) Hoffman**  
**Sept. 2, 1922-June27, 2012**



Sister Connie Hoffman had a remarkably positive and cheerful disposition, a keen sense of humor and an absolute trust in God. Connie was a true blessing to all of the sisters who lived and worked with her, as well as to all her students and co-ministers. She summarized her philosophy of how to live with these words: “You can be Livable, Loveable, Lendable, and Learnable - or Lax, Lazy, Loose, and Lousy.” Connie lived this advice and she taught her students to live it. She called it “my version of Bernard Haring’s ‘Fundamental Option.’”

Connie’s parents, Urban Hoffman and Cecilia Marie Miller, both of German descent, were natives of Monroe County, Michigan. After they were married, they lived on the Miller family farm near Maybee where their two children were born - Constance Geraldine in 1922 and Ruth Marie in 1925. In the late 1920s, Mr. Hoffman was hired by the Detroit Stoker Company here in Monroe. With income from that work, he bought a lot on Godfroy Street in Monroe, and there he himself built a house for his family. They moved into the house in 1929, just a little before the June 3 fire that destroyed our Academy.

In September 1929, although Connie had only completed kindergarten, her mother enrolled her in the second grade of St. Mary School. Within a short time, the “seed” of Connie’s call to religious life was planted. While still in second or third grade, she was chosen to be a flower girl for a Reception of the IHM novices. The Reception Ceremony took place in the beautiful Chapel of the Old Motherhouse on the River Raisin. Later, Connie saw the Old Motherhouse torn down and the lovely garden next to it become St. Mary Park.

The “seed” of her vocation was nourished during the years that Connie was a companion to one of her teachers at St. Mary School. Every morning, she accompanied Sister Florent Marie Crowley along the “back streets,” to the school. And after school, Connie would ride with the sisters in the IHM bus that took them

back to the Motherhouse. Recalling those experiences, Connie wondered if Sister Florent Marie “prayed I would become a future IHM replacement for her,” because Sister Florent Marie was always in poor health.

During her high school years at St. Mary Academy, Connie made her decision to enter the IHM community right after her graduation. Connie had thought about joining the Maryknoll Sisters, but was influenced by “a wise remark made by Sister Marie Joseph Marcero about the need for missionaries in Michigan.” On July 2, 1940, she began what she called her “walk with my Companion God.” In late August, as Connie attended the funeral of Sister Olivia Lester, her vocation was confirmed. “As I saw her coffin being wheeled down the aisle, I realized I wished to die as a member of this Community. At my Reception, I took the name Sister M. Olivia.”

Unlike the other novices, Connie could see her own house when the novices made their trips to the Grotto on our back property. She was terribly homesick and prayed to Mary: “Please keep me on this side of the fence!” Sometime later, she wrote: “I always attributed my vocation to our Mother of Perpetual Help and to my mother’s prayer, the Rosary, which we recited in May and October in our home.”

At the time of her profession in January 1943, Connie received what she described as a beautiful gift from God - a pair of shoes. From then on, a pair of shoes always symbolized for Connie the two “shoes” of trust and prayer that sustaining her in both happy and difficult times as she walked “with her Companion God” over the years. Her favorite hymn became “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.”

In later years, as Connie reflected back on her life, she noted the times when she most needed trust in her “Companion God.” The first was her assignment in 1946 to become the fourth grade directress of 40 boys at the Hall of the Divine Child. “I never had a brother, so this was a new [and challenging] experience.”

When her father died in 1957 at age 64, Connie was overwhelmed with sorrow and needed deep trust in God. A soldier in World War I, Mr. Hoffman spent months in wet trenches. As a result, he developed a heart condition which eventually took his life.

The next, and perhaps, the most challenging moment for her trust in God was when, in 1966, her sister, Ruth, suffered a stroke at age 38 after delivering the last of her five children. “Again my soul was tested because Ruth hovered between life

and death for over a month. She survived as a cripple ... and that changed our lives.” Connie’s mother helped Ruth and her husband raise the children.

Connie also placed her trust in God when, in 1972, she became the administrator of religious education programs, grades five through eight at St. Keiran’s in Shelby Township, Mich.

Her life of trust and prayer grew even deeper when, in 1975, as a member of the Charismatic Renewal, she was baptized in the Spirit – which she called the “high point of my life...This has truly changed my life and prayer mode. Praise God!”

Education was Connie’s principal ministry – elementary school teacher for 31 years; high school religion teacher for six years; religious education coordinator for 10 years. Through all those years – and into retirement – Connie sang these words to a melody I had never heard: “I got confidence God is going to see me through. No matter what the case may be, He’s going to fix it for me.”

The biggest concern for Connie after her father’s death in 1971 was the care of her mother. Mrs. Hoffman continued living in their family home, but Connie assumed responsibility for her mother. In 1982, to be closer to her mother, Connie moved to Monroe – teaching at the Academy for six years and then becoming the medical records coordinator of the Motherhouse health care center. By 1990 it was evident that Mrs. Hoffman needed nursing care and she became a resident of the Health Care Center where she died in 1993 at age 96.

Some years after her mother’s death, Connie was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. She gradually modified her ministry and finally became a resident of the Health Care Center in 2007. What she wrote about her ministry during those years reveals so much about Connie. “As a retired sister, I have the time and privilege to rest and pray. With failing health, I strive to be a cheerful example of Christ’s Redeeming Mission. My mission is to be a ‘pray-er’ for the IHM community needs, for the world situation, and for the support of very needy souls.”

Mary Jo Maher, IHM