

## Remembering Carola Keffler Jan. 28, 1937 – April 8, 2025

Remembering Carola brings a sense of awe at her genuine simplicity. When Carola moved to health care, there was a parade of visitors. The personnel on the floor asked, "Did she have an important position? So many are coming to see her." It was not that Carola had done anything so extraordinary. Just that she was loved, for who she was - peaceful, generous, open to all. At the first care conference, Carola was described as a "Master of Appreciation." How fitting! She expressed gratitude to everyone who walked through the door. She saw each one as an angel. Carola celebrated her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday a few days after arriving in health care, inviting all who came by to share the doughnuts, cake and ice cream given to her in celebration.



Her parents, Edward and Martha (Motter) Keffler, were both natives of Canton, Ohio. They were blessed with two daughters and two sons. Josephine, the oldest, was two years old when Frances (later known as Carola) was born Jan. 28, 1927. Robert arrived the following year. The youngest, Thomas, was born seven years later. Their house was a comfortable home built by their parents shortly after their marriage. Carola's father was a hard-working employee at the Timken Roller Bearing Company, a factory serving as a major Canton industry. Her mother saw to it that the family was properly cared for and made life interesting, challenging and happy. She was gifted with domestic abilities and gave the family a great sense of security and love.

In early childhood, Carola was fascinated with nature and was always mystified when she could watch the raindrops fall into the puddles and make a splash, watch the snow dance, swirl or float from the sky, or see the leaves change colors in the fall. This fascination with the love of the outdoors and nature continued as she matured. As she grew older, it helped her form a better sense of awe in the mystery of God and God's greatness and goodness.

Carola's eight years at St. Joseph, Canton, staffed by the St. Joseph Sisters of Cleveland, fostered a desire and attraction to religious life. By the end of eighth grade, she was convinced that she would become a Sister of St. Joseph when she graduated from high school. But God had other plans. Since the parish had no high school, Carola was transferred to St. John the Baptist high school staffed by the IHM Sisters, Monroe, and it was there that she had a change of plans.

Unfortunately, at the end of her junior year, the IHMs were recalled from the high school because of the low enrollment and the great distance from Monroe. The Humility of Mary Sisters replaced the IHMs for Carola's senior year. It was a great disappointment to have lost the IHM Sisters.

Since her first cousins, Mary and Jean Laubacher, had already entered the IHM community, Carola was invited by her uncle and aunt to join them when they went to see Mary and Jean in Monroe. Carola was captivated by the joy and hospitality she was given that day. Before she left, she had a visit in the rose garden with dear Mother Teresa McGivney and that did it!

It was August 1945, and Carola already had a full-time job, which she loved, as an accountant at a city bank. However, before the visit ended that summer, she was measured for the postulant habit and made plans to come to the IHM community on Feb. 2, 1946, Candlemas Day. Carola always cherished the blessing she received from God that day and all the gifts and blessings she received since. On August 15, Frances was received as a novice and was given the name Carola. Two years later, she made first vows.

Carola's teaching ministry began at St. Patrick, Carleton, where she taught first grade for one year. She felt she was not a great success that year, but better days were to come! Carola continued to teach the first grade for the next 19 years at Sacred Heart, Roseville, St. Anne, Warren, Epiphany and Gesu in Detroit and St. Mary, Mt. Morris. In the following years, Carola taught grade four at St. Bede's, Southfield, and St. Regis, Birmingham. In 1990, she returned to Gesu for 15 years as an office assistant and school secretary. Although she commuted to Gesu from Berkley, she spent much of her time at Gesu convent to have lunch with the sisters every school day and stay overnight when there were meetings or celebrations. Being in such close contact with the sisters at Gesu was a highlight of her working years. Gesu's school principal, Sr. Stella Rabault and her assistant, Sr. Cecilia Campbell, with whom she worked, were a delight. She often asked, "How did so many beautiful people come together in one place at the same time?" At the end of December 2005, Carola was the last Sister to leave Gesu School.

By 2005, Carola felt that she had reached the twilight of her life and put her trust in God that in her diminishment, God would continue to bless and support her to the end of her life with kindness and gentleness. Therefore, the decision was made to retire to the Motherhouse at the age of 78. There, she could spend more time in prayer, reading and ministering to the needs. Among her many ministries was to be sacristan and serve at daily, Sunday and holy-day liturgies. She was enriched by being the Coordinator of *God Works* Soup Kitchen for the Motherhouse sisters and staff, collecting money to feed the poor and homeless families in Monroe and surrounding areas each month for many years. Last month, Carola was recognized and honored for that ministry.

When the Gift Shop opened at the Motherhouse, Carola was one of the first to serve under the leadership of Patricia Glaab, IHM and later became a part-time volunteer. Carola enjoyed working with the laywomen there and all became very close friends. She was eager to do whatever needed to be done. Gail Addis, who took on leadership of the Gift Shop, shared that Carola never said "no" when asked to help on very short notice, was very conscientious and, if she made a mistake, made sure Gail understood what had happened so it could be corrected. She always wanted to do her very best but was able to accept her limitations and learn from them. Carola was a delight to work with; she was always positive, friendly and helpful to those who visited the gift shop. The volunteers loved and respected her.

In between her service commitments and time for prayer, Carola loved to read novels and all kinds of books. She loved sharing her current reading with the Gift Shop staff or those at the lunch table. They would talk about their understanding of what the author was saying. Carola was open and eager to learn and grow.

Most mornings, Carola would be seen walking the corridors, praying her rosary; she was a fixture in the early hours of the day. You could find her daily in chapel, praying in the afternoon. She was a deeply spiritual person. A woman without guile who experienced God's love for her. When asked what she thought was the most important thing to consider in life, without hesitation, Carola responded, "Trust God! God is always here with us." Carola claimed five

mystics as her models: Thomas Merton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Julian of Norwich and Frances Cabrini.

Carola consistently thanked God for being a presence in her life and for God's call and grace given to her throughout her life. In her final months, Carola saw God as light, touching each person, marveling at God as light.

Thank you for your witness to gracious, prayerful living. Go in peace, Carola. A full life lived well!

***Written and delivered by Annette St-Amour, IHM, April 11, 2025.***