

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER M. AUGUSTA ALEXIA JULY 27, 1930—APRIL 18, 2016



I have known Sister M. Augusta for more than 65 years. I am one of the group we lovingly refer to as the "Holy Year Group." There were 28 of us who arrived at Seton Hill on September 8, 1950, each with her own story and reasons for coming. Some of us were taught by the Sisters of Charity. How Augusta came to know us is a mystery.

What we do know is on one Sunday afternoon in 1950 she rang the doorbell at Sacred Heart Convent in Shadyside to be met by Sister Mary Zoe, whose job it was that day to answer the doorbell and telephone. When greeted by Zoe, Augusta asked what she had to do to be a sister. And the rest is history. Saint Paul had a light from heaven for his call. Augusta had a welcoming reception from Sr. Mary Zoe.

Ruth Helen Alexia was born on July 27, 1930, in Herman, Pennsylvania. Her parents were John and Clara Baldauf. She was the eldest girl in a family of five children. She had an older brother, John, who died in his early twenties. Before she entered, she worked in a book bindery for four years. Her employer was so impressed with her that he told her that if she gave up the idea of becoming a sister, he would guarantee her work for her entire life. But once Ruth made up her mind, there was no turning back.

On the application we all filled out to enter the community, there was a question about "motive." It is not surprising that her answer was, "to help others." And that she did, from day one of her time with us.

She was always close to her family. We are pleased that her two sisters, Shirley and Nancy, and her stepbrother, Eugene, are with us today. She would be pleased as are we, her religious family.

In community, we often refer to how we "help" others as ministry. Everyone's ministry is service. Even our superiors are identified as "Sister Servants." When I

reviewed the list of where Augusta ministered, the word that came to mind was *servant*. One of the forms in her file identifies what she did as "supportive service."

Indeed she was a servant, in the best definition of that word. The dictionary defines *servant* as one that is dedicated to a work. And dedicated she was whether her work was with the maintenance department at Seton Hill, under the capable direction of Sister Rose Agnes, or at Assumption Hall where she worked in a variety of ways—sometimes as a nurse's aide and at other times in the dietary department. When she came to Caritas Christi, she found many ways to "help" others, and always pleasantly helped where she could. She could be seen daily visiting the sisters on the second floor. She was a welcoming presence to those whose time on the second floor was a result of surgery or unexpected illness.

When she was at Assumption Hall and also when she came here to Caritas Christi, she found a special way of "helping" by doing crafts with Sister Christina. She was enthusiastic about her ability to utilize her creative talent under Sister's direction and her presence was appreciated by anyone who worked with her. Many of her creations were entered in the Westmoreland Senior Days event and she was known to win her share of ribbons.

I might note that to be identified as a servant is a noble profession. (The dictionary I quoted earlier made note that the term "servant" is often used for ministers as "servants of God.")

Augusta broke her wrist at one point and recuperated at Assumption Hall. When she was able, she was sent to a new ministry at Saint William Convent in North Braddock, a residence for senior sisters. Six sisters who lived there were wonderful additions to the Saint William Parish community. Each one made her own special contribution to life in this senior residence. Each took a day to cook. On occasion they performed special services for the parish. Two sisters spent many hours visiting the homebound. It was in this service that Augusta found her niche. She seemed to "blossom" with the special relationship she developed with the shut-ins she visited. One person in particular was a woman who lived just across from the convent. She was a quiet soul who had many needs that Augusta could fill. Sister was her shopper as well as the one who kept her bank records. When the woman died, the family made a special point of inviting Augusta to participate in the funeral.

Augusta never lost track of the "Holy Year Group." She always knew what each was doing and where each one lived. If one of us turned up here at Caritas Christi,

Sister's first question was, "What was the need that brought you here? Have you had surgery?" She was always concerned about each of us.

Prayer was always an important part of Augusta's community life. She could be seen in the chapel often and always was present at Mass. A sister called me yesterday to remind me of Augusta's dedication to the Blessed Sacrament and to be sure that I mention that devotion. Someone else reminded me of her habit of leaving a holy card on a sister's pillow, particularly in our early days.

A person's countenance reveals much about a person. Augusta was a happy person. She loved her God, her family, and her community. She often said how much she appreciated Caritas Christi and all that was provided. She said there was nothing she needed that was not available to her.

I found a copy of a thank you note which was written by someone in our group at the time of our Golden Jubilee. I didn't write it, nor did Sr. Augusta, but I think it reflects what she *would* say to the community she loved.

"Mother Seton reminded us of two things on her death bed: "Be children of the Church," and "Be thankful." As we have lived our lives as members of the Church and as members of the Sisters of Charity, we are indeed thankful—to God certainly for God's care for us, and for the many gifts we have received, especially for *you*, our sisters."

Dear Augusta, when you meet those of the "Holy Year Group" who have preceded you into heaven, give them our love. Rest in peace, dear Augusta.

Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Elizabeth Ann Stock
April 21, 2016