

IHM Sisters Centennial 1923-2023

One of the most beloved teachers from the 1940s through the early 1950s was Sister Mary Callista Rehr, known affectionately to all of her students as “Sister Callista.” She was born in Reading, PA, on March 9, 1908, and was baptized at St. Peter’s Church in Reading and given the name Marie A. Rehr. She attended St. Peter Elementary School and received all her sacraments at this parish. She entered the IHM Congregation in West Chester, PA, on January 5, 1933, and received the habit and Religious name Sister Mary Callista on August 16, 1933. She made her final profession on August 24, 1935.



Villa Maria House of Studies, the IHM Motherhouse, recently did a story about Sister Callista. The story is on their website in the “From the Archives” section.

Here is an excerpt:

In 1941 Sister was assigned to Villa Maria (the convent) in Falls Church, Virginia, where she was to remain for 10 happy years. She became a “dorm-mother” for the younger boarding school students and was delighted to teach her first grade students, who brought her joy each day at Saint James School, just across the street from the convent. The students, in turn, loved her gentleness, enthusiasm, and energy. Sister Callista underwent surgery during the year 1950-1951, returned to the classroom for a time, but her health began to fail considerably. On Easter Sunday evening, April 13, 1952, Sister Callista died in the infirmary at the West Chester Motherhouse, aged 44 and in the 19th year of her religious life.



Shortly after Sister Callista died, the parishioners of Saint James took up a collection to purchase a stained-glass window in her memory. In 1952, the church was being enlarged and new stain glass windows were being designed and painted by Anton Albers, Sr. The stain glass window chosen in memory of Sister Callista is situated in the sanctuary above the altar. It is referred to as the “Holy Spirit Rose Window” since it is in the shape of a rose. The twelve areas of red glass in the Holy Spirit window hold twelve tiny images of the Infant of Prague, for whom Sister Callista had a great devotion. A 1952 article in the *Catholic Virginian* referred to Sister Callista as a “little nun” in stature, “not much bigger than

her first graders,” who won “the hearts and affection of all—old and young alike.” Her devotion to the Infant of Prague as well as her reliance upon the IHM charism of “Divine Providence” was a great witness to all who knew her. Father Mullarkey said that “the rose window behind the main altar will serve as a memorial to this saintly nun” (*Catholic Virginian*, August 29, 1952).



Sister Callista with the statue of the Infant of Prague for which she fashioned beautiful clothes.

Another honor bestowed on Sister Callista was the establishment of the *Sister Callista Memorial Trophy* for outstanding participation in the Saint James Junior Catholic Youth Organization (C.Y.O.) program. Each year, an 8th grade girl was given this award in Sister’s memory for demonstrating the following qualities: sportsmanship, fair play, respect for officials and advisors, lack of conceit, control of temper, fidelity to practice sessions, obedience to orders, willingness to learn, and sheer talent. An equivalent award in memory of Father Edward Mullarkey was given annually to an 8th grade boy. Below is a photo of her tombstone where she is buried in Malvern, PA.



SAVE THE DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2023
12:00pm-4:00pm
IHM Sisters Centennial Celebration

Visit our home page, www.stjamescatholic.org, for further details on this celebration, including how to RSVP for the event, or scan the QR code to the right.

