

SR. ODILIANA ROHRWASSER, OSB

October 18, 1909 – October 23, 2005



Sister Odiliana! A woman of passion! PASSION FOR GOD! Passion for God's people and passion for God's creation!

Our alumnae from St. Scholastica's College, Manila where Sister Odiliana served for 26 years, and our alumni and lay mission partners from St. Joseph's College, Maasin, Leyte who have carved a niche in Sister Odiliana's heart, as well as the alumni from our schools in Angeles City and Lapu-lapu, cannot and will not forget Sister Odiliana: an excellent educator committed to Christian principles, no compromise, no half measures!

As a teacher, she could expound on the principles of earth sciences and mathematics, then move on to philosophy and theology. From classrooms to the science laboratories and the sections on electronics, then back to the classroom, Sister Odiliana insisted on academic discipline, principles of morality and her unbending standards of Christian decency. Alumnae love to recall Sister Odiliana's insistence on decent clothes: skirts below the knees, no sleeveless dresses, no plunging necklines and more so, no spaghetti . . . Some took her words in fear and trembling, others with a certain lightness and fun, and yet, all had a deep respect for their dear Sister Odiliana for all she had done to help them grow into maturity, "to be true and finished women of character."

Former students recall how Sister Odiliana worked as a high school teacher or a college professor and Moderator of the Sodality with a certain sternness. But they also know that behind that stern demeanor was a warm, loving heart that could embrace the entire universe.

Our sisters who have known Sister Odiliana for quite a time know that she had a special love for the people of Maasin, Leyte where she served as superior and directress of St. Joseph's College. In that double capacity, she was instrumental in the reconstruction of the high school building and in laying the foundation of the college wing. Her class '51 produced three priests. Sister Anselma Palar who, as a lay teacher, worked with Sister Odiliana, was amazed by the fact that when she visited Sister in her room just a year ago, Sister Odiliana could still sing the College Hymn of St. Joseph's Maasin, from beginning to the end. That speaks of Sister's strong and constant love for the people she served.

One wonders where all this tenacity and versatility in service comes from. A look into Sister Odiliana's personal history, as related by Sister Ottfrieda, can throw light into the matter.

Sister Odiliana was born in Freiburg, Baden, West Germany on October 18, 1909. Being the only daughter of Herr Joseph Rohrwasser and Frau Otilie Guenter, Maria Anna, now Sister Odiliana, was given the best opportunities for a well-rounded education in the best schools of Freiburg: Home Culture, Oberschule (equivalent to Liberal Arts) and Nursing. It was in the early 30's in the springtime of her life, that the young Maria Anna, equipped with professional training of a woman of her age, felt God's call for the mission. The father, who cherished his only daughter, did not approve Anna's plans for life. Nonetheless, with a noble heart, he himself brought Anna to the train station for her trip to our mother house in Tutzing.

Anna was admitted to the convent in 1932. The following year, she was sent as a postulant to the Philippines in a freight steamer, the S.S. Fulda in a group of twelve, among whom were Sister Clodesindis Lucken and Postulant Christina Link, who was destined for Korea. Both would become future Prioress General. For clothing and temporary profession Sister Odiliana had as companions a Filipina, Sister Aida Villareal and a Chinese, Sister Lieou Sy, constituting the first international group in the Philippine Priory.

It was her resolute desire to SEEK GOD AND HIS GLORY IN ALL THINGS that sustained Sister Odiliana through her years of active service in the field of education. With her degrees in Bachelor of Science in Education, Master of Arts in Education and a Certificate from the School of Theology for Sisters, she spent the best years of her life in the education of the young. Her special line was science – physics in the high school and chemistry in college.

On the morning of December 8, 1941 news broke out that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and war had been declared. Sister Odiliana, who was at that time assigned in Sacred Heart Academy, Cavite, together with the other sisters were advised to leave their convent and move to Manila which was declared an open city. Their white habits were muddy and bloody, some veils were torn and most petticoats were in shreds and used as strips of bandages for the bleeding civilians. She was one of the heroines of Cavite during that dreadful event. In 1983, Sister Odiliana was assigned to our convent in Baguio. For seven (7) years she served as the Sisters' Infirmarian. Sisters who came to Baguio remember how Sister Odiliana's spirit of service has helped sustain the morale of the community even in those trying moments of the tragic earthquake that shook Baguio, the calamity that destroyed our St. Benedict's building. All through the years of destruction, reconstruction and renovation of our convent in Baguio, Sister Odiliana stood by the Sisters who needed her help and care. Sisters will remember how she brought life to community recreation with interesting information about almost anything. Above all she will be remembered for her witty sense of humor that brought delight to all.

In the mid-90's, Sister suffered from a fall that damaged the nerves of her spinal cord. Slowly, paralysis of the lower body set in and Sister had to be confined to a wheelchair and her bed. Intense pains afflicted her; but she bore these pains, accepting her condition from God as "bread broken for others." What was so touching is that amidst these pains, she graciously welcomed any Sister or caregiver who came to her room. She kept herself alive to what was happening in God's world. She would ask Sister Natividad to give her news about anything going on in the world, from politics, economics, and Church events. Her sense of gratitude was most touching. Whenever Sister Brigida would read a book for her, Sister Odiliana would say, "Thank you! Come again!"

Even in the last hours of life, Sister remained conscious and responsive. In the dark and still hours of the new day, Sunday, Sister started getting restless. Our faithful nurses, Tomasa and Connie, were attending to her. Tomasa said, "Sister, please wait, we are only two". And Sister Odiliana obediently replied, "Oh yes!" At noontime, Sister Monica Nabirye, the community Infirmarian, together with the caregivers sang for Sister Odiliana. At the end, Sister Monica said, "Sister we sang for you your favorite song: "Go tell everyone..."

Sister Odiliana had a great PASSION FOR THE MISSION. Rohrwasser, her family name, means pipe water, gushing out of the Fount of Wisdom, softening sod and soil that it may bring forth fruit for the mission. By God's special design it was on the 23rd of October, 2005 when the Universal Church was celebrating MISSION SUNDAY that Sister Odiliana gave her entire life to the Lord. Like the flickering flame of a candle Sister's life slowly, quietly faded away until it was drawn by THE GREAT LIGHT OF AN ETERNAL DAY. Together with the angels and saints and the galaxies of stars and the whole of God's creation, we can sing with her,

"Go, tell everyone the news that the Kingdom of God has come."

Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, Prioress
Manila Priory, October 23, 2005