

Sister Jean Clare Rohe, 100 years young, looks back on service in Baltimore

Editor's Note: March 12 marks the 100th birthday of Sister Jean Clare Rohe, of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, who gave 48 years of ministry to the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The following tribute was prepared by her religious community.

“A simple farm girl that made good.” That is how Sister Jean Clare Rohe, OSF, describes herself. After a century of living, she has quite a story to tell. She was born on March 12, 1918 on a small farm in the White Marsh area of Baltimore County, and is the oldest of an astonishing nine siblings. She remembers the farm fondly and in great detail. She spent many of her younger years working on the farm—picking lima beans, tomatoes, turnips, etc. - produce that would later be sold at the wholesale market for a profit. “I loved working on the farm.” she said. “There were always indoor chores and house cleaning to do with so many babies but I preferred to be out where the action was - working with the men in the fields.”

However, school was just as important. Her mother would never allow the farm work to take precedent over school work and insisted that all the children attend Catholic school. So even though there were some schools closer, Jean and her siblings had to go into the city for school. She and her sisters attended Seton High School. It was an adventure. Each day the children had to walk three miles (or hitch a ride) to the bus stop, then take three different street cars to reach school. “You didn’t want to miss the bus,” she jokes.

Sister Jean entered the congregation at the age of 17 along with her cousin, Sister Alice Catherine (now deceased). It was a hardship on the family farm to have the help of both girls removed, but the family was always supportive.

After entering, Sister Jean was assigned to teach grade school children, then later taught high school. She spent 48 years teaching in Baltimore and another 27 in Wilmington. She had the pleasure of teaching several of our sisters, including Sister Helen Jacobson and Sister Pat Smith. When asked what great memories she had of teaching, she said, "I had great students. Never had a problem." Sister Jean smiled when she described how she never missed a day of school when teaching - not one day! She would tell her students, "Do your homework because I will be here tomorrow to collect it."

"I had Sister Jean for homeroom and biology in my sophomore year at the Catholic High School of Baltimore," said Sister Helen Jacobson. "I hung out after school to help out in the science lab almost on a daily basis until graduation. Naturally, I asked her to sponsor my entrance into the congregation and so I refer to myself as 'her kid.'" Sister Patricia Smith also had Sister Jean as a teacher in high school. Sister Pat explains, "She just knew her students, not just academically but also personally."

When asked how it feels to be turning 100, Sister Jean replied, "The dear Lord has been very good to me. I don't know what it means to be sick. Never even had headaches." She continued, "I have really enjoyed being a sister and everything I have done in my life." She credits her longevity to taking life one day at a time and eating fresh food picked straight off the vine.

Sister Jean spends her time now in prayer and hospitality ministry at Assisi House and joins in many of activities offered there - bingo, exercise, celebrations. Her favorite pass time is playing cards - especially pinochle or pitch. She still likes to

play when she's together with family and what a family it is. Over the years the family has grown to more than 50 all together and out of the nine siblings all but one are still living. I guess the farm fresh food does make a difference.

"Sister Jean is an awesome, upbeat centenarian who proclaims that she is blessed to be a Sister of St. Francis," explained Sister Pat Smith. "She embodies the spirit of Francis in her simplicity, hospitality, and ability to find goodness in all creation."

Sister Jean will celebrate with her sisters in community on her birthday, March 12. We wish you a very happy birthday Sister Jean!

Sister Jean's ministry history:

Archdiocese of Baltimore

- 1941-46 - Immaculate Conception School, Towson
- 1946-55 - SS Philip and Paul School, Baltimore
- 1955-72 & 1983-89 - The Catholic High School of Baltimore
- 1972-74 - Our Lady of Mount Carmel High School, Baltimore
- 2005-14 - St. Anthony of Padua Rectory, Baltimore

Wilmington Diocese

- 1938-41 - St. Paul School, Wilmington
- 1974-83 - Padua Academy, Wilmington
- 1989-04 - St. John the Beloved School, Wilmington

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

- 2014 - Present - Assisi House, Aston