



BENEDICTINE SISTERS

SACRED HEART MONASTERY
in CULLMAN, ALABAMA

916 Convent Road NE, Cullman, AL 35055 ~ www.shmon.org ~ (256)734-4622

September 23, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CULLMAN—Sister Mary Ruth Coffman, O.S.B., a Benedictine Sister of Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL, died on Saturday, September 22, 2018, at the age of 88. Sister Tonette Sperando, Prioress, led the prayers at her bedside, with Sisters gathered around her. The body will be received on Tuesday, September 25, at 4:45 PM in Sacred Heart Monastery Chapel in Cullman, with Vespers of the Dead at 5:00 PM. Visitation will follow. The Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 3:00 PM on Wednesday, September 26, with interment to follow in the monastery cemetery.

Born in 1929 and christened Doris, Sister Mary Ruth's early years were spent in Tennessee where she attended local schools and was raised in the Protestant faith. As a teenager, she was adopted by Judge Runa D. and Genevieve Coffman of Birmingham, AL. Sister excelled academically at Birmingham's Ensley High School from which she graduated in 1947. Following high school, Sister attended Birmingham Southern College for one year before transferring to the University of Alabama.

After completing her B.A. in Education with a major in English, Sister Mary Ruth took a position with the Birmingham News. An encounter with a Catholic co-worker led to Sister Mary Ruth's conversion to Catholicism. The same co-worker later brought Sister to Cullman to hear the monastic community pray Vespers. As Sister Mary Ruth later recounted, "I loved it; I knew that was what I wanted to do." Sister was accepted for admittance into the community at Sacred Heart Monastery and in 1952 she entered as a postulant. In 1953, she entered the Novitiate and received the religious name, Sister Mary Ruth. She made temporary monastic profession in 1954 and perpetual profession in 1957.

Following perpetual profession, Sister began work on her M.A. in English from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., to further prepare her for what would be many years in the ministry of education at both the high school and college levels. While English and journalism were her primary subject areas she enjoyed teaching other subjects,

"WE BELIEVE THAT GOD IS HERE AND CAN BE FOUND, AND THAT A DIVERSITY OF PERSONS BONDED INTO UNITY SHOWS CHRIST TO A DIVIDED WORLD."

too, and especially enjoyed working with students in various extra-curricular endeavors such as the school newspaper, drama, and honor society. Most of her years in the ministry of education were spent at Sacred Heart College and Cullman College in Cullman. However her years at John Carroll Catholic High School in Birmingham, St. Jude High School in Montgomery, and St. Bernard Preparatory School in Cullman provided her with many cherished memories and life-long friends.

A talented administrator, Sister Mary Ruth served as Academic Dean and Registrar at Sacred Heart College and as Treasurer and later President of the Alabama Association of Journalism Directors. Later, when Sacred Heart College was in need of a librarian, Sister Mary Ruth was sent to study at Peabody College where she earned her M.L.S. degree.

Within the monastery, Sister Mary Ruth's influence and impact has been immeasurable. Her many roles have included serving as secretary on the Monastic Council, Novice Director, Scholastic Director, Archivist, Librarian, and Development Director. She was the inaugural editor of *Benedictine Update*, envisioning the publication, bringing it to life, and serving as editor for sixteen years.

A key service that Sister Mary Ruth rendered to the monastic community was her research and authorship of *On Good Ground*, a history of the community that was published in 1993. She authored a supplemental Centennial Edition in 2002 on the occasion of the community's 100th anniversary of their founding. An additional written work, *Build Me a City*, was a biography of Fr. Harold Purcell, founder of the City of St. Jude in Montgomery.

Through her life experiences, Sister Mary Ruth developed an expansive, welcoming heart and a strong trust in God that never wavered. She was a woman of deep prayer, a tireless encourager and a life-long learner. Her peaceful, serene nature was balanced by a joyful spirit that delighted in the presence of friends and in the wonders of God's creation. Sister Mary Ruth had a great love for monastic life and for her monastic community. Her Benedictine Sisters, along with many devoted friends and former students, mourn her loss.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Benedictine Sisters of Cullman, AL, 916 Convent Rd., Cullman, AL, 35055.