

SISTER M. LINUS WILHELM

140. SEPTEMBER 20, 1924

Sister M. Linus, formerly Mary Wilhelm, died at the Motherhouse on September 20, 1924, in her 68th year, the 54th of her religious life. The cause of death was consumption and dropsy. Funeral services were held in the Motherhouse Chapel on September 22, with burial in St. John Cemetery, Joliet, Illinois.

When failing health necessitated her transfer to the Motherhouse Infirmary, she bore her illness cheerfully and in gratitude for the care she was given. At 3 a.m. this Friday, the Sister Infirmary noticed an alarming change in her condition whereupon several of the Sisters and the Superior were hurriedly called. Prayers for the dying were said and Sister Linus expressed her readiness for God to call her. She died calmly after 53 years of faithful religious life. In regard to poverty there was nothing of hers to dispose of, since her few pieces of clothing, no one would covet. She was known to have suffered from a lingering consumption which also included dropsy, weakness in the limbs.

Mary Wilhelm, the daughter to Joseph and Mary Mintz Wilhelm, both of Rhein-Pfalz, Germany, was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on December 24, 1856. She became a postulant on April 16, 1871, entered the Novitiate as Sister Linus on July 9, 1871, pronounced her First Vows on July 16, 1872, and her Final Vows on July 16, 1873, when she was 17 years old. Her Mission Record included:

1871-74 St. John the Baptist, Joliet, IL  
1874-75 St. Mary, Rock Island, IL  
1875-78 St. Rose of Lima, Lima, OH  
1878-80 St. Francis Assisi, Ottawa, IL  
1880-96 St. Procopius, Chicago, IL  
1896-00 Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Chicago, IL  
1900-01 St. Wenceslas, Chicago, IL  
St. Procop, Cleveland, OH  
St. Stanislas, St. Louis, MO  
1901-05 St. Joseph, Joliet, IL  
1905-07 St. Francis de Sales, Chicago, IL  
1907-08 St. Mary, Columbus, OH  
1908-12 St. Ludmilla, Chicago, IL  
1912-14 Sacred Heart, Chicago, IL  
1914-16 St. Francis Assisi, Chicago, IL  
1915-24 St. Francis Convent, Joliet, IL

During the school year of 1900-01, Sister Linus substituted in two schools early in the fall, she was then sent to replace Sister Raymund Dannenmueller at St. Stanislas, St. Louis, Missouri. During the course of the school year, she wrote often to Mother Alexander concerning Rev. Urban Stanowski's plan to start a new Franciscan community for the Polish children by having Sisters: Solana Leczny, Ernestine and Hilary Matz, as founding members of the new group. May 29, 1901, is the date of the separation. Sisters Linus, Damiana, and eventually Sister Cyrilla returned to Joliet with the caution not to discuss this happening. Finally many years later the matter was cleared with all the church authorities, the new community is known as the Sisters of St. Francis of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, or the Polish Franciscan Sisters of St. Louis, Missouri.

Another interesting event in the life of Sister Linus is recorded in the annals of 1883-84. The annalist opens the story with this remark:

**From the following rather singular event in the year 1883, we see how exact those who are authorized to admit candidates to religious congregations, ought to be in carrying out the wise regulations of the church, which makes it obligatory for the applicants for the religious life to present a certificate of their Baptism before being admitted.**

Sister Linus relates:

I lived with my parents in East St. Louis, Illinois, until 1863 when my mother who was a Protestant died. I was then 7 years of age and was adopted by my father's sister, Mrs. Catherine Ferrara, who lived in St. Louis, Missouri. The other children, six in number were adopted by other relatives of my father, except my oldest brother, who remained with my father and worked with him at the carpenter trade. My aunt being a good Catholic, sent me to Holy Trinity School in St. Louis. At the age of 12, I received my First Holy Communion and was confirmed on the same day. Three years later I felt myself called to the religious state. The Sisters of St. Francis of Joliet, were at the time, 1871, in charge of St. Anthony School in St. Louis, and as several of my companions were about to join their community, I also applied and was kindly received by the Mother Superior. I was not asked to bring my Baptismal Certificate, nor did I worry about it. I was very happy during my religious life, until a few months ago, 1883, when it occurred to me that applicants to the religious life are required to bring a certificate of their Baptism. I began to wonder why I had not been asked to bring mine. Then again I satisfied myself with the thought that probably my foster mother had seen to it herself, for she was well acquainted with the Superior, Mother Alfred. At first I did not consider it a matter of consequence, however, the thought came again and again and at last haunted me, so it seemed; yet I had not resolved upon making any inquiries. One night I had a rather mysterious dream. It seemed to me that I saw St. Ann teaching her Blessed Child Mary how to knit. Presently she pointed her finger at me and said, Sister do you know that you are not Baptized. My amazement on hearing this was so great that I could not answer. The question was repeated several times, and each time more emphatically. Finally I answered that I knew nothing about it and could not believe it to be true, that I had been reared a Catholic and had made my First Communion and had been Confirmed. St. Ann repeated the question once more in a very severe tone and paused. I said not a word in reply. She then told me that I would not find out that it is true, but that my father would not acknowledge his neglect until he would be on his deathbed. On awaking I felt much worried and I immediately sought advice from one of the Franciscan Fathers at St. Peter Church in Chicago. According to his

opinion, there was reason for suspicion, especially on account of my mother's having been a Protestant and he advised that I make a careful investigation as soon as possible. I at once wrote to my foster mother and begged her to tell me all she knew, or would be able to ascertain regarding my doubt. Soon after I received an answer from Mrs. Ferrara in which she said that my inquiry did not surprise her as much as I supposed it would, that although my doubt was caused by a dream, she at once thought it all to be true, since she for some years had reason to suspect that my father was not a practical Catholic. On that account it was difficult to broach the subject to him, yet she now took courage to ask him whether I had been baptized. He evaded the question and reproached her for being suspicious regarding such a thing. Then my Aunt went to the church in East St. Louis, to find out whether we children had been baptized. The priest on looking through the Baptismal record found that only one of the seven children, the oldest boy had been baptized, when he was two years of age. He advised my aunt to tell me not to wait for further information, but to prepare to receive the Sacrament of Baptism at once. He also wrote me a letter to that effect. My next proceeding was to go to Joliet, and acquaint the Mother Superior, Mother Celestine, of my strange discovery. The convent chaplain Rev. Eugene Puers, OFM, was sent for and the letters were shown him. The result was I received Holy Baptism in one of the private oratories of the convent on that same day, December 26, the Feast of St. Stephen, in the presence of Mother Celestine and Mother Angela, the Mistress of Novices. In the following July, 1884, I was Confirmed by Archbishop of Chicago, the Most Rev. Patrick A. Feehan, also in private.

N.B. We add that ten years after in 1893, Sister Linus' father died in St. Alexius Hospital in St. Louis. At the approach of death he sent for his sister, Mrs. Ferrara and told her he had deceived her in regard to the Baptism of his children. He also admitted he had for a number of years not attended to his duties as a Catholic but that he was now reconciled to God and to the Church. His last petition to his sister was, that she repair some of his negligence by using her influence that the rest of his children be baptized, however, one of the four surviving children, a daughter, consented to receive Baptism.