Mary Otillie Ripplinger, known as Sister William Christine, was born in Chicago on June 23, 1927. She was the first of six children born to Edwin and Clara (Wangler) Ripplinger. Her parents were still very young when their families moved to neighboring farms in Belle Rive, Illinois. This is where her mother and father met and went to school together. In her autobiography Mary wrote:

After their marriage at St. John Church in Dahlgren, Illinois, mom and dad moved to Chicago. Dad had gone to Chicago to find work prior to their marriage. He had worked at a coffee company, but was a Yellow Cab driver at the time of my birth.

By the time her family moved into St. Columbanus Parish in 1932, her dad was working at the Fair Store in the Chicago loop as a window washer and Sister Mary now had two brothers, Edwin, Jr. and Irvin. The following year she entered first grade at St. Columbanus School, where she met the Adrian Dominicans.

At the age of seven, Sister Mary had her first experience of death when her brother died.

Irvin died suddenly a week before he was four years old. This affected me very much. I think that at the age of seven I saw how unpredictable life can be. It seems to me that it was then that I started to think about religious life.

When her mother received a small inheritance from the sale of her parents’ farm, the family moved to Harvey, Illinois, in 1938. Now they were able to begin the process of purchasing their first home. Her sister Francis Jean was born that year.

After completing grade school at Ascension, Sister Mary attended Thornton Township High School. Her family could not afford Aquinas because of the distance and cost. During her high school years, she kept asking her parents for permission to enroll in the Congregation’s Preparatory School. She wrote:

Each summer I asked about going to Adrian. The answer was, “Wait awhile.” From the time that I had talked about entering, Mom always said, “I would rather see you in the convent and happy than out of it and unhappy.” Dad would say, “Wait awhile.” Since I was the oldest I don’t think he was ready to see the family start to break up. I also think that divine Providence wanted me to help at home a little longer.

However, after supper on May 31, 1945 Dad asked me if I still wanted to enter the convent! (My youngest brother, Charles, had been born that morning.) I told him that I had promised mom that I would help her that summer as her doctor had requested. Dad then gave me permission to enter in September.
Sister Mary entered the postulate on September 8, 1945 at the age of eighteen. After first profession in August 1947, she taught in five Michigan elementary schools over a twelve-year period that ended in June 1959. Here is Sister Mary’s account of those years.

*My first mission was St. Brigid’s in Detroit. When I returned from a movie at Dominican High during Christmas vacation, I learned that I was to move to St. Alphonsus in Dearborn. I only had been at St. Brigid’s since August!*

*After five and a half years at St. Alphonsus, I unpacked my trunk one August day to prepare for the coming school year there. The next day I received the appointment card telling me to move to St. Dominic’s in Detroit. I repacked my trunk!*

*Three years later I was sent to St. Ambrose in Detroit where I received another unexpected change during Christmas vacation, this time to the Upper Peninsula – Munising, Michigan. I arrived in Munising, the only passenger on a logging train from Powers, Wisconsin. The coach had wrought iron plush seats, a kerosene light hanging from the ceiling, and a desk for the conductor at the front. Upon arrival at Munising, I learned that a blizzard had just gone through there. The station was closed due to a recent fire and, because of a communication glitch, nobody was there to meet me. A man who had come to pick up a load of bread offered me a ride. I arrived at the convent in a bread truck!*

From 1959 to 1965, Sister Mary was assigned to Sacred Heart School in Solen, North Dakota where she served as principal and teacher. Solen is a small rural area with a small population. Current population is 83. She and Sister Arlene Seckel each taught four grades. Sister Mary wrote, “I could write a book about our experiences in Solen.” She added, “This was the end of my unexpected appointments.”

From Solen, North Dakota, Sister Mary was sent to St. Edward School in Elgin, Illinois, where she began teaching high school math. Three years later she was assigned to Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette. Open placement became a policy during her seven years at Regina Dominican, and so in 1975, Sister Mary applied for a teaching position at Newman Central High School in Sterling, Illinois. She taught there for three years and lived with an intercommunity of Sisters who were teaching at the school: three Sisters of Loretto from Kentucky, one Sister from the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM), and one Adrian Dominican. She described it as “an interesting experience.”

While she was at Newman Central High School, Sister Mary served on a North Central Evaluation Team that was assigned to visit St. Edward High School in Elgin. It was during their visit that Father Joseph O’Neill asked Sister Mary if she would return to Elgin to help schedule classes and teach a few math classes. She accepted the offer because, as she wrote, “I was missing being closer to my own community [and so] I accepted the offer to remain in Elgin for the following eighteen years until I retired in 1996.”
In her autobiography, Sister Mary described her sabbatical year, 1996-1997.

In the fall of 1996 I began to experience a wonderful sabbatical year. I went to a sabbatical program at Springbank Retreat Center in Kingstree, South Carolina, where I became aware that I have more artistic talent than I had realized. I was encouraged to pursue pottery, watercolor and basketry techniques which I learned during the program. (My paternal grandfather made baskets for use on the farm.) Each year I have gone to a local community college to take watercolor or pottery non-credit courses for older adults and have been encouraged by the teachers. I never thought that I would be attending college when in my 70s. These activities allow my God-given creative abilities to be expressed.

After her sabbatical year, Sister Mary began volunteering two days a week at Sertoma Centre in Alsip, Illinois, where, for nine years, she tutored slow learners, some of whom were mentally/physically challenged young adults.

Sister Mary returned to Adrian in 2008 and resided in Regina. The following year she moved to Maria, where she died on July 22, 2015, at the age of eighty-eight and in the sixty-eighth year of her religious profession.

Father Jim Hug, SJ, opened the funeral liturgy with this prayer

Mary’s love of mathematics and of arts and crafts taught us to see anew the order, the beauty and the wonder of Your creation.
We thank you for calling her to this community, for watching over her through dangers and difficult times, and for inspiring her to participate fully in the community’s life as long as she could.
As we listen to the words of Jesus describing how the grain of wheat must die to bring forth great fruit, Deepen our trust in You and our peace, as You deepened Mary’s.
Strengthen our confidence that we too will rise through death and be reunited in Your Love.
We make our prayer in the name of Jesus and the communion of your Spirit where we all are one with You and with Mary, now and forever. Amen.

In her homily, Sister Jodi Screes reflected on the readings\(^1\) and on Mary’s seventy years of teaching and guiding the youth of her day. She said:

\[ I \text{ am certain that Mary was the religious woman that never sought accolades, never expected a pat on the back, or looked for her name in the news or the Congregation bulletin. After hearing about Mary’s life last night, perhaps we would all agree that she was a nun on the run – embracing one assignment after... \]

\(^{1}\) Romans 8:14-23 and John 12:23-26
another, even going to the farm lands of south central North Dakota, and ministering within the sacred ground of the Lakota and Dakota Indians. She and Sister Arlene Seckel were sent to teach in the town of Solen which today has a population close to eighty-three.

These two sisters must have had a profound influence on the lives of the people of Solen, bearing witness, as the words from Romans in today’s reading reminded us: “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit...that we are children of God.”

In and through Mary a mind boggling number of children, teenagers and adults were recipients of her childlike love and her indwelling Spirit.

Mass ended with Mary’s brother Charles singing the *In Paradisum* in Latin.

Center photo: Sisters Mary Ripplinger, left, and Mary Annella Tracy, both teachers at St. Edward High School in Elgin, Illinois, pose on a motorcycle that was to be auctioned off at the school’s annual Tidal Wave benefit in April 1995.
Far right: Photo of Sister Mary from St. Edward High School’s 1966 yearbook.
Left: The Ripplinger children, from left, Irvin Leo, Mary Otilie, and Edwin William III, circa 1933. Center: Sister Mary at her graduation from Thornton Township High School, Harvey, Illinois.

From left: Bill Murray, Sister Mary Annella Tracy, and Sister Mary Ripplinger.