

Remembering Sister Rose Huelsman, IHM

March 30, 1943 – Sept. 30, 2014



We are gathered here today to celebrate the life of Sister Rose Therese Huelsman (Sister Richard Mary). Rose was born in Cincinnati, the third child of Marion and Richard Huelsman. Her two brothers, Larry and Dick, were 8 and 13 years old at the time and welcomed their little sister, who would always remain very special to them. Her brothers died a month apart in 2007. Dick, a Jesuit priest, was well known for his teaching and his many publications on prayer. Larry was an engineering professor at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Rose was very close to them and to Larry's wife, Jo, whom she considered the sister she never had. Surviving them all are Larry and Jo's son, David, his wife and their three children in Tucson.

Soon after Rose was born, the family moved to Cleveland. She graduated from the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland's Beaumont High School and came to Detroit to attend Marygrove College, where she roomed with Happy (Helen) Shondell, Sister Clare Francis. It was there that she met the IHMs. She later recalled that it was there that she thought (and I quote), "These women speak to me of who I would like to become." And four years later she did!

Her active ministry began by teaching religion for seven years at Marian High School, followed by a year at Immaculata High School. She then launched her 47 years of service out-of-state in Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Missouri.

She first went to St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, where she taught sociology and became union program director under dean of students, Brother Edwin Reggio, CSC. It was here that her love of people and her gifts of creativity and the ability to interact with others blossomed and directed her future ministries. Rose and Edwin became close and lasting friends. She drove to Notre Dame last year to see him as he lay dying. They certainly will have a great reunion in heaven.

The time at St. Edward's was also the time Rose and I lived together, prayed together, worked together, and camped, canoed and hiked together. We learned how to water ski together, too, but she was on her own repelling off of Enchanted Rock! She also participated in an "Outward Bound" program out west where she did whitewater rafting and stayed on a horse after he had thrown her off three times!

The last three years of her 11 in Austin, Rose was director of community development and adult programs at St. Ignatius Parish. There she fostered the growth of small Christian communities, gave spiritual direction, implemented adult sacramental programs and RCIA and created a parish newsletter. It was this experience at St. Ignatius that called her to continue in parish ministry.

So, after a sabbatical year of study at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, she went to Tennessee, ministering in both Memphis and Humboldt. Her love of people and her call to help them led to involving parishioners in outreach programs to the poor and in networking with various agencies.

After three years in Tennessee, Rose went to Edmond, Okla., as pastoral assistant at St. John the Baptist parish where she also did freelance work; teaching, directing retreats, designing and facilitating environmental workshops, giving spiritual direction and the list goes on ...

From Oklahoma Rose returned to St. Ignatius in Austin for five years. Then it was off to Kansas City, Mo., for the last 19 years of her wonderful service.

For the first 10 years, Rose ministered out of the Center for Pastoral Life and Ministry. She once described this ministry as “an awesome place to work with creative, collaborative colleagues.” Here she conducted various workshops and seminars on spirituality, social justice, environment, and prayer—often using her brother Dick’s writings.

The last nine years in Kansas City, Rose was associate chaplain at St. Luke’s Hospital (half-time). It was while here that her interest in the problems facing our environment led her to be certified to conduct the well-known symposium titled “Awakening the Dreamer.” She often described herself as an “outdoorsy person,” so it’s not surprising that she devoted so much of her love, time and effort to preserving God’s beauty in the world. In addition to “Awakening the Dreamer,” she had given many parish presentations on environmental stewardship, encouraging people to talk and to act to bring about positive climate changes, to use resources wisely, to work for justice and sustainability. She also established “Green Teams” to work on environmental protection.

Rose was very impressed with the work of the Pachamama Alliance and nominated them for the first Sustainability Award given by the IHM community. The alliance received the award in 2011.

Other examples of her continual enjoyment of what nature has to offer are the many camping trips she made with her dear friend Pat Culpepper of Austin to sites in New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Texas, Wyoming and the last one to South Dakota. Pat recently wrote to Rose, “Words cannot convey the influence you have had on my life.” I’m sure many of us could voice the same words of gratitude.

That Rose has left an enduring influence on people was certainly evidenced on the occasion of her 80th birthday last March. Mary McIntyre flew her to Austin where she and Pat Culpepper brought together about 25 friends for a great party. The following week, back in Kansas City, at least 50 friends toasted and feasted her royally.

In closing, we recall what Rose once claimed gave her energy was to work collaboratively to articulate a vision and create ways to move toward that vision and to provide experiences that free people to take hold of their Christian lives in response to God's call.

Certainly one way she demonstrated this was by leading and accompanying the following women on their journeys to IHM: Sister Kathryn Olsen in Oklahoma, who wrote glowingly of Rose's presence in their lives. Associate Darlene (Dee) Baker in Kansas City, who has been the rock supporting Rose these past several weeks and Sister Barbara O'Neill, novice, who flew back to Kansas City to be with Rose as she was dying. This is only a sampling of how Rose satisfied that energy. There are many others who have lovingly testified how Rose touched and influenced their lives.

Now, after three years of bravely fighting cancer, her life has come to a peaceful end. We will greatly miss her presence among us, but we also share her peace. And, so we join Rose as she prayed in the IHM Book of Life. "As the deer longs for running streams so my soul longs for you my God."

Written and delivered by Grace Mary Olf, IHM

Oct. 10, 2014