

SISTER MARY ROSE KNORR
February 27, 1915 — November 29, 2005

Many years ago I had a retreat director who had a particular phrase that he repeated over and over throughout the retreat: "Keep it simple." If I had had the opportunity to ask Sister Mary Rose what kind of commemoration she would like on this occasion, I think she would have replied "Keep it simple!" and so I'd just like to reminisce a little about Sister Mary Rose.

On February 27, 1915, there was great rejoicing in the home of Jacob and Charlotte Knorr, for on that day they welcomed into their life, the first of their nine children whom they named Marie. At that time, the young family lived on Pittsburgh's South Side and resided in Saint Michael Parish. When Marie was five years old, the family moved to Creedmore Avenue in Brookline, where she lived until she entered our Community in 1938.

After graduation from the eighth grade of Resurrection School, Marie traveled by streetcar each day to attend Saint Justin High School on Mt. Washington. After two years, the high school was discontinued and Marie completed her education at Resurrection's two year commercial school. It was during the time of the Great Depression, but she was fortunate enough to find employment as soon as she finished high school. For seven years she worked as a secretary to contribute to the support of the large Knorr family. In 1938, when she told her employer, Mr. Callahan, that she was resigning, he was reluctant to have her leave until he learned of her intention to become a Sister of Charity of Seton Hill.

On September 8, 1938, Marie became a postulant, and on New Year's Day, 1939, she received the habit and the name, Sister Mary Rose.

As most of us did, Sister earned college credits by attending Saturday classes and summer school. In 1954, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Pittsburgh. Some time later she earned credits in school administration while attending summer sessions at Marquette University.

After her canonical year, Sister Mary Rose joined the other novices as they set out on their first mission. For a brief period of five months she taught fifth grade at Saint Kieran School. However, in the early 1940s, she was assigned to Saint Luke High School in Carnegie as a teacher of business subjects. She remained there from 1943 to 1946. She often related that every Saturday during that period she traveled from Carnegie to Lawrenceville where at Saint John the Baptist High School, her mentor, Sister Ann Michaelae, assisted her with preparation of the lessons that she would teach the following week.

In addition to Saint Luke High School, Sister taught in most of the high schools in which our sisters have served. From 1946 to 1952 she taught at Sacred Heart High School and from 1952 to 1959 at Saint John the Baptist High School in Pittsburgh. Her teaching experience was interrupted for a period of three years (1959-1962) when she performed clerical service in the treasurer's office at Seton Hill.

In 1962, Sister Mary Rose returned to Saint John the Baptist High School this time as its principal and also the Sister Servant of the local community. From 1969 to 1972, Sister continued to live at Saint John the Baptist Convent while teaching at Lawrenceville Catholic High School, a merger of Saint John the Baptist High School with other Catholic high schools in the area. From there Sister went to the mountains where she taught at Bishop Carroll High School in Ebensburg from 1974 to 1977. Her next and last teaching assignment was at Geibel High School in Connellsville where she remained from 1977 to 1986.

Sister Mary Rose spent the next decade of her life at Seton Hill. For four years (1986-1990), she assisted in record keeping in the Community Archives. The following two years, she visited with sisters at Assumption Hall and helped them with their correspondence. For eight of her ten years at Seton Hill she served as the treasurer of the Saint Joseph Community. In that role she was always readily available and most generous.

Beyond the demands of her principal duties, Sister Mary Rose has always been ready wherever and whenever she was needed. For many years Sister graciously served as coordinator for the “Summer Sisters” at Seton Hill. She was ever generous as a volunteer: offering to do typing for others who lacked her clerical skills, to address Christmas cards for the Generalate and invitations for the Korean Card party and other events. Sister attributed her beautiful handwriting to her mother who taught her penmanship even before she started to school.

There was never a mission or place that she did not love. And I know certainly that there is one place that had special claim to her affections—Saint John the Baptist High School and Convent. Not even the unwelcome aroma of the hops from the brewery across the street on Liberty Avenue was able to diminish her fondness for Saint John’s. One of her special memories of that place was that she was able to help so many underprivileged students. She often recalled that in the days when Monsignor, later Bishop, Connare, was pastor of Saint Richard’s in the Hill District, at his request, she was able and willing to admit some of the African American students who did not qualify for entrance into other schools.

This short review of Sister Mary Rose’s life and ministry is a remarkable record of her dedication to the mission of the Sisters of Charity, and reaffirms what we all know, that hers was a most generous spirit.

Another trait that we all recognized in Sister Mary Rose was her love for people—first her family, her parents and her siblings. This love for others extended to our Community, to her many friends, to her professional colleagues, and to the many students whom she taught for so many years.

On Tuesday of this week, Sister Mary Rose reached the end of her journey. We know that we will miss her at Caritas Christi and we are confident that, as she has loved every mission on which she has ever served, she will definitely love her new home in heaven with the God she served so faithfully.

And if Sister Mary Rose were here, I think she would say to us what she wrote on the program for her 50th Jubilee celebration:

I am grateful

...to the good Lord for inviting me to come and serve him;
...for the many graces and blessings he has bestowed on me these many years;
...for the years of peace, happiness, joy, he has given me;
...for the sisterly, charitable, friendly, and loving Sisters of Charity I have met, lived with, and worked with through all these years;
...last, but by no means least, I am grateful for my mother and father, sisters and brothers, sisters and brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews, friends, relatives who were always there when I needed them.

I am really most grateful! God Bless you all!

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Mary Philip Aaron
December 3, 2005*