

Remembering Sister Rita Lavoie
1925 - 2021



*“our oneness in Christ extends
beyond this life,
the bond of community
unites us even after death”
(Const. #59/d.31)*

On July 29th, 2021, the feast of St. Martha, a faithful believer in the resurrection, our dear Sister Rita Lavoie was released from all earthly restrictions and slipped away peacefully into the fullness of life with her Beloved Jesus. After years in Xavier Hall where full care was provided, she is now reunited with her dear family members, Ursuline sisters and friends.

Rita was born into a large, loving family on January 9, 1925 in Bircham, Alberta. With 13 children in the family and a musically gifted mother, Yvonne, there was enough talent to form their own band which played at local dances. Her skilled father, Emereal, was a carpenter, merchant, blacksmith, postmaster and grain elevator agent. Rita remained close to her siblings throughout her life and they were devoted to her, making room in their homes for visits, music and family gatherings.

Rita entered the Ursulines in 1944 and made her final profession at St. Mary's Cathedral, Calgary in 1949. Throughout her life she ministered as a teacher, a pastoral worker, a missionary, and a visitor to those imprisoned. She also served as community leader at both the general and local levels. As she moved across the provinces and as far as Kingston, Jamaica, living in different communities about every four years, she was unfailingly gentle and compassionate in her approach. Whether she was sitting with a prisoner or

a dying parishioner, teaching a primary student or listening to sister's concerns, she was gracious, good humoured and receptive.

The celebration of her life was held on Wednesday, August 3. The prayers which had been prepared at Rita's request many years ago by her dear friend, Sister Leona Henke, were led by Sister Sheila McKinley. It was a welcome gift that at least some members of the community were able to gather in the same physical space. Covid-19 restrictions have prevented gatherings here at Villa Angela for a long time. The sisters anxiously look forward to the time when we can open our doors to families and friends who are such an integral part of our lives.

Father Dikran, a good friend and supporter of Sr. Rita, presided at the Mass of Resurrection. Drawing on the theme of light from the readings, he reflected about how Rita, drawn to Christ, her everlasting light, was a light bearer herself throughout her days, reaching out to everyone with a warm and glowing presence, bringing good news wherever she lived. At the end of the Mass, Sr. Rita's body was taken from Villa Angela, flanked by the pallbearers, Sisters Anne Denomy, Noreen Allossery-Walsh, Rose Marie Rau, Diane Sloan and our faithful friends from Peseski Funeral Home who led her past the honour guard of her Ursuline Sisters. The prayers at St. Anthony's Cemetery were led by Sister Theresa Campeau.

A beautiful and very recognizable thread that was woven colourfully and consistently through Rita's long life was gratitude. She ends her life story with these words:

Above all, my grateful heart continues to give thanks to our Great God whose generosity knows no bounds. I love Him with all the love he has showered on me through family, community, friends and companions in ministry. May God bless all who have touched my life.

Amen. Rita

