

EULOGY OF SR. ROSE RIZZO

BY: SR. MARGIE VERHOFF

Rose was 95 years old and a CDP for 78 years! Amazing!

She retired to Holy Family 11 years ago – but remained active, serving in the community and in the gardens. Her ministry experiences include 40 years as an elementary school teacher, 10 years in pastoral ministry at Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission in Kayenta, AZ (1987-'97) where she ministered to the mostly Native American parishioners of the Navajo tribe. On returning to Kentucky, she coordinated transportation for Sisters at St. Anne Convent for five years, then lived 2 years in Covington, ministering to residents of a local senior residence. She retired to Holy Family Home in 2014, where she continued to be of service in the community. This is where I got to know Rose.

In 2019, the Sisters at Holy Family had the opportunity to watch and discuss Joan Chittister's video series "The Blessings of Aging." Joan began with a quote from Louis Kronenberger: "*Old age is an excellent time for outrage. My goal is to say or do one outrageous thing every week.*" There was laughter in the room as we all turned to look at Rose who was smiling broadly. We were remembering stories we had heard about her: rescuing a goat...cooking meals unable to be recognized by their aroma (she was into "natural vitamins")...climbing the apple tree...riding her bicycle from St. Anne's to the garden (wearing a long skirt and a wide-brimmed straw hat)...serving as a "Sister Fix-It". You knew that if you needed someone to help you, Rose would be there – especially if it involved using something from her tool box. But the project closest to her heart was converting the area around the no longer used septic system into a beautiful *Meditation Garden*.

When Rose entered the convent on September 19, 1943, she noticed over the front door, the large sign in Latin (*Providentiae tuae me committo*). She learned that the English translation was *I commit myself to your Providence*. In reflecting back on her life, she realized that those words above the entrance had been for her just an elegant decoration until forty-some years later. In 1987 she was asked if she would be willing to go to Kayenta, AZ, to replace Sr. Noel whose eyesight was failing – and Rose said "Yes." She had been there 2 or 3 years, when one Sunday afternoon, something happened as she and her community companion were taking a walk along a creek near Kayenta. They heard the tinkling of a bell and saw a herd of goats. As the herd moved on, they noticed one goat stuck in quicksand. Using some logs and the strap from Rose's purse, they managed to rescue the goat. In reflecting on that incident, it occurred to Rose that God had "sent" them (herself and the other Sister), and provided some logs, and Rose's purse strap, to save one of God's "least" creatures who cried to him. If God had guided them in the rescue of the goat, wasn't God just as carefully guiding them in ministering to God's people? Rose claimed her time of ministry in Kayenta as the "*beginning of her understanding, appreciation and romance with God Providence*".

An example of her relationship with Jesus is one of the first things I learned about Rose. She enjoyed playing Solitaire on the computer. I happened to walk in on her one day and heard her say, "Thank you!" I asked who she was thanking. Her reply: "My solitaire partner – Jesus. He plays with me and helps me see moves I can make when I get stuck."

She loved being outdoors and praying in nature. Sometimes she could be found in the Mary Garden, raising her hands in the air, praising God, enjoying being with the Lord.

She also loved to sit at the window in the Health Care dining room, waiting for the sun to reach a certain spot over the tree outside and shine on her. For her, this was an experience of God's love for her each day.

Many years before, she had experienced a turning point in her prayer life. While reflecting on Mary's apparitions at Fatima, she was struck by the way the children prayed the rosary when they were in a hurry. Instead of praying the full Hail Mary, they simply said "Hail Mary, holy Mary." Rose found that this was a meaningful way for her to pray the rosary. As she repeated those words slowly, the scenes of the mysteries passed through her mind. She found it very freeing not to have to say a lot of words. This allowed her heart to hear.

"During the 15 years of CDP presence in Kayenta, CDPs played an important part, along with the Dine Reservation Headquarters and local support, in helping to establish a much-needed shelter for abused women and their children. The door of the first shelter – a loaned house – was opened in 1987, [the year Rose arrived]. Around 1990, they had enough money to buy a double-wide trailer. Eventually, a new shelter was built in the field behind the police station. The yard was enclosed with a fence to keep the children safe.

1982 – Province Nuclear Disarmament Statement - Nevada's Great Basin and Mojave Deserts are known for nuclear weapons testing. While Rose was in Kayenta, she went to Nevada to participate in a peaceful protest at the Nevada Nuclear Test site. The movement's goals were the ending nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site and to demonstrate for Nuclear Disarmament.

Rose hoped to be remembered as someone who appreciated continuing education. I saw this when I began to minister at Holy Family. Every Monday morning after Mass, Rose would walk (or bike if she was running late – which happened most Mondays) over to Moye Center to faithfully attend Fr. Bill Cleves' 10:00 weekly presentations on Scripture. And she loved to share what she had learned with those who were at the dinner table with her.

While in New Mexico, Rose took advantage of the opportunity to attend some of the Tekakwitha Conferences. She loved to visit various parks and museums in and around the area to learn more about Native American history and heritage. In her ministry, she learned from the people she met in AA groups, Religious Education classes, and while helping give out clothing to those in need.

In the last few months of her life, when she was no longer able to read, she appreciated when someone would read to her.

Many of us will remember Rose as a true "woman of Providence" who lived simply, lovingly, with a heart for those in need, and trusting in God's care.

Most of all, Rose hoped to be remembered as someone who could simply say "Jesus" and let the sentiments of love, faith, and trust fill her soul and overflow to the caller (people / Jesus) at the door.

May she now rest in the outrageous love of Jesus.