

## Sister Rita Walsh

*Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances:  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Rejoice. Pray. Give thanks. And do these things all the time.

If you think that it is unrealistic for anyone actually to live this way, you never met Sister Rita Walsh. Perpetually positive, rooted in prayer, and grateful for the many blessings that she continues to enjoy, Sister Rita exemplifies a life full of charity, love, and joy.

Sister Rita grew up in Dover, New Jersey. Both her parents were models of faith for Sister Rita and her older sister. “I can still see my father kneeling down at the side of his bed saying his prayers and my mother prayed all day long.”

The faith instilled in Sister Rita by her parents was nurtured by the Dominican Sisters who taught her at St. Mary School in Wharton. Sister Rita admired these nuns and felt called to a religious vocation from an early age. She became even more convinced of her own calling after attending high school at the Academy of Saint Elizabeth and coming to know the Sisters of Charity. “I wanted to be a teacher and being with the Sisters of Charity, it just jelled.” She jokes, “After being at the Academy, I said, ‘I like it so much here that I’ll stay!’”

Sister Rita entered the Sisters of Charity in 1948, four months after her graduation from the Academy and one month shy of her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. She was soon missioned to teach while completing requirements for a degree in Latin and Greek from the College of Saint Elizabeth.

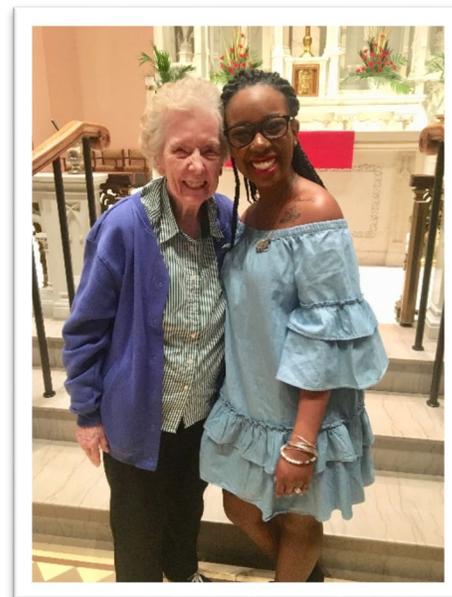
After initially teaching at the elementary level, Sister Rita really found her niche as an educator when she taught high school Latin, first at St. Peter’s High School in New Brunswick and later at Bayley Ellard High School in Madison. Her own credentials as a Latin scholar were augmented by earning a Masters Degree from Catholic University and studying in Rome as a Fulbright scholar.

When Sister Rita talks about her years as a teacher, she says, “I had so many experiences in school and I loved every minute of it.” Sister Rita was always very connected with the students and active in the life of the school, whether through the yearbook, student council or other activities. She says, “I’m a joiner and I did almost everything except for music.” She adds, “I don’t sing or play. I’m a music dud!”

Following 15 years at Bayley Ellard, Sister Rita went on to serve for 15 years as Principal at St. Aloysius High School in Jersey City. Again finding great joy in her ministry, she recounts that time by saying, “I loved every bit of it. Just loved it – though it was a job and a half!” She returned to classroom teaching with 24 “wonderful” years teaching Latin and English as Marist High School in Bayonne.

Wherever she served, Sister Rita enjoyed the community life of the convent. “You meet nice people and you learn from them.” She enjoyed eating, praying and laughing with the other sisters. She still chuckles over a particularly funny incident (the “Ovaltine story”) that occurred when she lived with a sister who has since passed away. “She and I laughed about that so many times. She went to her grave remembering that. It was nutty stuff!”

After more than 60 years as a teacher and principal, Sister Rita retired from the classroom to serve as caretaker for her older sister. In 2015, Sister Rita moved back to the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse. Though her vision is substantially impaired by macular degeneration, she is thankful to continue to live a full and interesting life.



*Tatyanna Frost with her best friend Sister Rita.*

Sister Rita's cheerful presence has been a gift to the community of people who live and work in the Motherhouse. She says, "I am a happy person," and her joy is contagious. "It doesn't cost a nickel to say hello to someone, reach out to people. We all want to be recognized." She adds, "I'm a talker, but there's no need to gossip or grumble."

Sister Rita's positive influence has been especially appreciated by the interns who spend time in the Motherhouse and eat lunch with the sisters. The interns love to hear Sister Rita's stories and appreciate her humor and her counsel. She has developed a very special bond with one young lady who proudly calls Sister Rita her best friend.

Sister Rita participates in the wide range of activities offered in the Motherhouse and especially enjoys working with two Seton Associates to assemble and decorate little gifts for needy children. She laughs, "You don't need a lot of cerebral material to do this." Her mind stays sharp not only from all her activities but also from avidly listening to talking books. She particularly enjoys biographies and non-fiction. She says, "I like all the true stories. You never know what kind of interesting facts you'll learn!"

Now celebrating her 70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee as a Sister of Charity, Sister Rita says without hesitation, "Everything I've done, I've loved." She describes herself as a simple person whose faith brings strength and contentment. "God is in charge. I know He will take care of everything and I've never been disappointed."

Sister Rita reflects, "I'd like to be remembered as having made a difference to someone in some small way." The many students, coworkers, community members, and so many others blessed to have Sister Rita in their lives would agree that this legacy is assured. Thanks to Sister Rita, there is more joy, more prayer, and more thanksgiving in the world as she continues to show that life according to the will of God in Christ Jesus is life that is good indeed.