

# **Sister Amalia Marie, CSC**

(Maria Amparo Rios)

February 10, 1930 – January 24, 2024

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**These memories were lovingly prepared by Sister Ann Therese Sinclair, CSC, who recited them at Sister Amalia’s funeral on February 1, 2024.**

*¡De Colores!* Sister Amalia Marie (Rios) was “a coat of many beautiful colors” — both inside and out. A rich tapestry of life, lived richly and deeply from her Mexican American culture and heritage. She celebrated this throughout her life in Holy Cross. She was so dedicated to our Lady of Guadalupe and shared this devotion with others. Being a minority in the community during her early years, and feeling that at times, she welcomed and cherished all the wonderful diversity that we now experience in Holy Cross.

Sisters, family and friends who shared their memories of Sister Amalia knew her to be kind, free-spirited, resilient, bold, faith-filled, generous, joyful and creative. She greeted each person with her warmth and her beautiful smile — as if you were the only person in the world in that moment.

Sister Amalia’s family loved her dearly and were always excited to welcome her home on her vacation, especially during the years she taught at St. Paul’s in New York City. They relished her tales (and she always had tales) of life and adventures in the big city.

Amalia grew up in East Austin, Texas. When her mother was ailing, Amalia received permission to live back in her home to care for her. While with her mother, Amalia became involved in ministry in the family parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

For her nephew, Michael Guiajardo, Sister Amalia was a hero. He stated, “Due to her efforts, our neighborhood was saved from total gentrification and has been revived with the historical heritage of our community.”

Sister Amalia's fight for dignity in our home neighborhood was instrumental in the creation of the Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation, which serves hundreds of renters and homeowners with affordable and dignified housing in Central East Austin. Sister Amalia will be remembered as a pioneer in the fight to preserve Austin's affordable housing for the present and future generations."

This time for Amalia, this ministry, was the one for which she was most grateful and proud. She was also proud of the fact that the Sisters of the Holy Cross generously contributed to helping to make this happen.

Amalia had a big heart. She was a people-person. In all her ministries, she forever had the needs of the poor and underserved, especially women and children, in her quest for justice.

A story that attests to Amalia's determination happened when she met Lady Byrd Johnson. She gave her phone number to Amalia and told her to call her if she ever needed anything. Not surprisingly, when something came up that needed help in the neighborhood project, she called Lady Byrd Johnson in the White House, and it was taken care of immediately.

A challenging, major life experience for Amalia in her earlier years was her very difficult and life-changing cancer surgery. The surgery altered her facial structure, which caused Amalia to struggle with communication and made eating extremely challenging. Despite this, she took this in stride, not complaining, ever positive and grateful to be alive. She was always finding very creative ways to make this work. It never changed the courageous, joyful person Amalia was. And it never slowed her down.

In recent years, Amalia traveled to Indianapolis weekly for months with the hope that the doctors there could create a better prosthesis. She was a real trooper through a very trying time. The end result was still challenging. Amalia, however, was ever grateful for the generous efforts of the doctors there.

Sister Amalia Marie endeared herself to our drivers — frequently asking them to take her to the Mexican bakery where she loved to pick up her favorite pastries and chat with people there. She also loved to peruse Macy's, looking at colors, which she loved and wore so well, or picking up something that helped with her food process or helped someone else. On her latest trip a couple of weeks ago, she picked up a bottle of Chanel #5. If you visit her grave in the future, you might pick up a lovely fragrance.

Amalia was all about celebrating life and enjoyed making things fun for others. She set about creating fiesta wherever she could. Two sisters remembered taking a group of students to Austin as a vocation trip. Amalia was there and heard that the circus train would be unloading all the animals there. She thought it would be a wonderful thing to watch. No one ever told them that the camels spit. So, the fun adventure turned into screaming, ducking and laughing. Years later when those sisters would meet, they would say, "Remember the camels?" and laugh! Amalia had a great sense of fun and celebration.

Everyone remembers Amalia's unconditional friendship with Sister Mary Ellen McGlynn through many years. They were partners in many wonderful trips and adventures. They both knew the words to every song imaginable and loved serenading the sisters in the convent, inviting others to enter into the joy they exuded! Even as Sister Mary Ellen's health declined, Amalia patiently and lovingly attended to her dear friend.

During Amalia's final week in the hospital, though weak, her body was thirsty. She was groggy but awake. People were trying to guess what she wanted to drink, finding it hard to understand her. Finally, Amalia said, "c-o-f-f-e-e." She was still alert — and in charge.

Some would say Amalia Marie walked to the beat of a different drummer — perhaps a Mariachi band. Today she is singing, creating fiesta, holding a banner of our Lady of Guadalupe and dancing in the drumbeat of God.

We thank you, Amalia, for the life you so generously and joyfully shared with us.