

# **Sister Rose Marie Canty, CSC**

(Sister Marie Pierre)

August 7, 1925–July 21, 2020

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Patricia Cornell, CSC, who read them at Sister Rose Marie’s memorial Mass on March 18, 2021.**

I have known Mary Margaret and Frieda Canty since we attended St. Cecilia’s high school together in Washington, D.C. I did not get to know Sister Rose Marie Canty until my later years when I would visit my bandmate, Sister M. Ellen Dolores (Lynch), CSC, who lived with Sister Rose Marie. When I moved to Saint Angela Hall in 2002, Sister Rose Marie welcomed me. When she moved to Saint Mary’s, I welcomed her, and it was then she asked me to give her memento and gave me some papers about her life.

I share her early life and ministry in her own words in 2010: “I was the oldest of five children, three sisters, Kathleen, Mary Margaret and Frieda, and one brother, Owen, who was in the middle. We were all born in western Maryland, a small town called Midland. Our parents, Margaret and Owen, had also been born there. For the first five years of my life we lived in the Canty home with several aunts and uncles. It had a very large sloping field, which was a great playground. The nights without streetlights were very dark but the sky was full of starlight and we were sure we could see the man in the moon. This part of western Maryland had been named Paradise. When I was 5, we moved into our own home in town. In 1935, as the Great Depression wore on, our parents decided to move to

Washington, D.C., where we also had family. There, at St. Peter School, we met and learned to love the Sisters of the Holy Cross, their friendliness and joyful spirit. This association was never broken. Owen attended Gonzaga (College) High School and the girls St. Patrick's and St. Cecilia's." Rose Marie entered the Congregation in 1943, received the name Sister Marie Pierre, and made first profession on February 2, 1946, and final profession August 15, 1949.

"After nine years teaching in elementary and secondary schools, I was sent to Dunbarton College as treasurer. For the next 31 years I was involved in financial administration of Dunbarton and Saint Mary's College as well as several stints on the Provincial Council as treasurer." We are indebted to Rose Marie for her financial expertise when hospitals and schools were being built in the Eastern Province.

At age 60, she began a new ministry. I quote her again: "In 1990, I was led to the social justice group, the Quixote Center. This was by far the most satisfying of all my ministries." I visited her during her work at the center and she was immersed in social justice issues with Sister Ellen Dolores, Rev. Bill Callahan and sisters of other congregations. She visited projects sponsored by the center in Nicaragua, which took her into hill country, traveling in the back of a truck over rough roads. Whether she participated in public demonstrations or less colorful activities, like stuffing envelopes trying to meet mailing deadlines, she was enthusiastic about her work.

In 1985, Rose Marie had the opportunity for a sabbatical in a hermitage. This was a significant time for her. During her later years, she often quoted her spiritual director while sharing what she had learned about herself. She loved solitude, kept

journals of her life, and wrote poetry. I would call her a spiritual seeker. Some of her favorite authors were Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Helen Luke, Thomas Berry, Diarmuid O'Murchu and John O'Donohue. Her article, "Gospel Women—A Reflection," for a Congregation publication, was published in 1996. She took Vatican II to heart and integrated her spirituality and justice practices. She was a pioneer and a prophet, since this was in the early years of systemic justice, before we had a congregational justice office. She loved nature, and for her to choose a green burial was a natural outcome of her values.

In 2007, at age 82, Rose Marie moved to Saint Angela Hall, Kensington, Maryland, and in 2014 to Saint Mary's Convent, Notre Dame, Indiana. Three months into her 90th year, she wrote that she would judge her health as good. She was able to navigate with her walker, and her greatest inhibition was her hearing difficulty and macular degeneration.

Over the years, she was close to her birth family of sisters and their children and grandchildren. Her large family was important to her and she was an important influence on them. I was privileged to be present at her 90th birthday party, when her sister, Mary Margaret, and many of her nieces and nephews came to Lakeside, Michigan, to celebrate with her with prayer and feasting of food and the beauty of nature. Since her death, I and several Holy Cross sisters gathered for a Zoom prayer service prepared by this extended family to honor her life.

As a way of looking over her life, I invite you to think of beautiful Russian nesting dolls. A small doll is covered with a larger doll, and this continues with another larger doll. Sister Rose Marie began her life before Vatican II and was competent in her financial ministry and had leadership positions

in the Congregation. She had the ability to supervise and an innate ability to get along with people. Not losing those qualities, she expanded her knowledge after Vatican II when the Congregation was just beginning to be involved directly in structural social justice issues. She did not need to be “in charge” but was supportive of others in leadership. She worked together with sisters in other congregations and enlarged her vision of the world and women in the church. Then, as she aged, she faced physical challenges with grace. She grew in her contemplative life, recognized that religious life was calling us to live in the “middle space,” and expanded her consciousness of evolution until she was called to her eternal home on July 21, 2020—to Paradise. The Russian dolls express her lifelong spiritual quest. She kept her original faith, but it expanded to include a wider growth.

I think Sister Rose Marie’s poetry expresses her soul-nature and I share one of them.

### **Perhaps**

I would like to be someplace  
where there is a meadow and  
where I could see the sea and  
hear it lapping against a sandy beach.

And I would like it to be autumn with lovely cool air,  
but warm enough to have a picnic lunch at the beach or  
on the rise of land close by.

I would have a horse, if I could, but  
at least a bicycle and  
I would walk in the woods and along the beach.

And I would have a chair that just fits and  
sit and read and nap and pray and write and paint.

And my soul would thus be filled with peace.

My mind would clear,

my body would have energy and

I could perhaps return to the sick and  
the dying and the hurting ones.

I could perhaps endure the news broadcasts  
of wars and killing and abuse.

I could perhaps even have hope for  
the Church which I love and which is falling apart.

I could perhaps have the courage to be  
a “scandal” and a “heretic” if need be.

I might even have the courage to

stand up and

be counted. Perhaps then I could hold it all.

Perhaps the God – and God is Love – who is not  
at the Center of my being, but

at the Center of the Center

which, even I, in my own being,  
find it hard to penetrate.

Perhaps this God, if I were to ask, would  
be for me

cool breeze of autumn,

sweet sound of the sea

at least for awhile.

**–Rose Marie Canty 8/17/93**

On March 9, 2010, she answered the question: What would I want people to know if I couldn't speak? She replied: "I would want them to know I appreciated their kindness. And when death comes, I would want people to remember that I tried to do what I could to build up the body of the Cosmic Christ." We are grateful for Sister Rose Marie's life of witnessing to the Gospel.