

# Sister Miriam Angela, CSC

(Mary Ellen Volkmer)

January 30, 1936–September 4, 2021

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Mary Turgi, CSC, who read them at Sister Miriam Angela's funeral on September 23, 2021.**

Approximately 21 years ago, I was graced with one of the greatest gifts I have ever received when I began sharing life with Sister Miriam Angela, known simply as Miriam to most of us here.

Until that moment, Miriam and I had scarcely been aware of one another's existence; and on the surface, it didn't seem that we had much in common. Miriam had spent much of her ministerial life as a teacher and administrator in elementary schools, and I had been a college math teacher turned community organizer and justice animator.

However, our coming together was orchestrated by Sister Kathryn Callahan, CSC, who was then the Midwestern Region coordinator. Kate, as she was affectionately known, had lived with each of us at different times, and she assured us this would work out very well.

I'm not sure that either one of us was particularly convinced of that at the time, but we decided to give it a try and just see what happened. And "happen" it did! Within just a few months, we found that Kate had been most assuredly right; we discovered that we both had found not just a suitable housemate, but a lasting *soulmate* as well.

Mementos often detail a sister's ministries over the years, but I had missed most of those by the time we connected. At that time, she had retired from her elementary school ministries and was serving as sacristan in the Church of Our Lady of Loretto. When asked to do this remembrance, I decided to focus not so much on what Miriam *did* during her life, though her accomplishments were many and significant, but on who she *was*—and still is—for all of us even now.

In the past few weeks, I've been listening carefully to the words and phrases sisters and others have used to describe Miriam. There has been a remarkable consistency in those comments; they almost always highlighted qualities such as gentleness, kindness, her love of quiet and a contemplative spirit, her graciousness and gratitude, to name just a few.

Undergirding such qualities, though, I would say lay a strong, deep passion for life and beauty wherever she perceived them—a determination to live life to its fullness and a recognition that Earth itself and all of its “creatures great and small” deserved her reverence.

Miriam loved “*all* things bright and beautiful,” but she had three special loves that characterized her life. The first, as all of us here know, was Earth and all created beings, whom she revered and cared for so tenderly, especially her beloved rescue cats inside and the outside feral cats who appeared regularly at our doors seeking food, care and, yes, even affection. She knew and marveled at their unique personalities—their intelligence, their likes and dislikes, and their favorite people. It's no wonder that the first question she encountered, whenever she travelled these halls, was always, “Miriam, how are the kitties?”

Miriam's second great love was music, classical to be sure, but particularly liturgical music. For years, she travelled to the National Pastoral Musicians Annual Conference and returned home all excited and energized by the new liturgical music being produced, and with stacks of new music to bring to both Barb and Carrie in the Liturgy Office.

Miriam was one of the earliest members of Barb Ziliak's choir when Barb first joined us as director of liturgy. Miriam had a stunning voice and was Barb's lead soprano in those days, and she remained a devoted member of the Loretto choir until she no longer had the energy in recent years.

A poster in Miriam's room at home reminded both of us daily that “God gave us music so we could pray without words.” This she was able to practice faithfully because inevitably some musical piece from our Sunday liturgy would stick in her mind throughout the week and

become the focus of her prayer. The last one of these pieces in her final days of life was *Mater Ecclesiae*, which we sang earlier in today's liturgy.

Miriam's third special love was not only cherishing existing beauty but bringing beauty to birth through her own creativity. And that "beauty" took many forms, from professionally orchestrated musicals to lovingly crafted quilts and gifts for newborns and personally designed altar clothes for the Church of Loretto, from a well-tended garden to annual jellies from the lush grapevine in our backyard. Wherever Miriam could find or create beauty, she was spontaneously drawn.

A second bedroom poster that Miriam loved featured a quote from the philosopher Buckminster Fuller, which spoke not only of Miriam's experience of God, but also her sense of her own call to make God's transforming energies tangible in ways she alone could do. She leaves us this quote as a gift to reflect upon in terms of our own lives. It reads:

"For God, to me, it seems, is a verb, not a noun."

For God, it seems to me is a verb... .

In memory of Miriam, I invite you to take some time today and beyond to reflect on this quote.

How does this simple phrase speak to you?

What does this quote and Miriam's living of it call each of us to in our very diverse lives?