

**REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER MIRIAM RITA KELSEY**  
**January 11, 1916–September 16, 2015**



At one of the later Summer Festivals, a sister asked Sister Miriam Rita if she could stay longer at a booth: Her reply: “Whatever is necessary!” In many ways, she lived that reply throughout her life. She was a “Woman for all Seasons,” all places, and all times, doing “whatever was necessary.”

There were five children in the Kelsey family: Fred, Dorothy (who was Sister Rebecca), Becky, Rita, and Aimee. The parents—known always as “Mother and Daddy”—were Fred, an accountant, and Emma, a nurse. The children grew up in Sheridan, belonging to Holy Innocents Parish and attending Holy Innocents School.

Although Sister Miriam Rita would have liked to have gone to Saint John the Baptist High School, finances were such that it was necessary that she attend nearby Langley, where she took the Commercial Course, received a very good education, and, she said, enjoyed herself.

Because of a January birthday and skipping a grade, she graduated from high school at the age of 16 and immediately began working as a stenographer for Chrysler in Oakland and then for Crucible Steel in downtown Pittsburgh. When she decided to enter, one of her co-workers could not understand how she would give up such a good salary—at that time—to become a Sister of Charity. On a form she filled out during her years in the community, the question was asked: How did your parents feel about your entering? Her answer: Both reacted favorably. Although my father felt I liked having a good time too much and wouldn’t be able to adjust. He gave me six months!

From the day she entered, in 1942, at the age of 26, until her death at the age of 99, Sister Miriam Rita did whatever was necessary, moving from mission to mission, and from field to field. She received a bachelor’s degree in business education from the University of Pittsburgh and a master’s degree in educational administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati. Her background in business was often at the forefront in her many years of ministry. After two years teaching in elementary schools, she became a high school business teacher, teaching at Elizabeth Seton, Saint John the Baptist, Sacred Heart, Saint James, and Bishop Carroll in Ebensburg. Her students were excellent, usually able to obtain secretarial positions immediately upon graduation. She was principal at Holy Innocents High School and at Seton High in Chandler, Arizona. On occasion, throughout the years, she was asked to work in other areas: at Providence Hospital, at McGuire Memorial, in the Seton Hill University Registrar’s office. She worked as business manager at Assumption Hall and at Sacred Heart High School. When she left Sacred Heart in 1987, she accepted a position at Saint Jerome’s in Charleroi for a year, completing the parish census by mail, assisting in the office, and helping to build community in the parish. When she came home that

summer, she thought that Sister Sara Louise (Reilly) and Sister Mary Rose (Knorr) could use some help in the Archives, so she asked to help, eventually becoming assistant archivist until her so-called retirement in 2001, when she continued to volunteer in the Archives. At the prayer service for her retirement from the Archives, she was characterized as precise, efficient, competent, a speedy typist, comfortable and skilled with a variety of office machines, and with a subtle sense of humor. She was marked by a sincere interest in all that concerned the community.

This commitment to the community led to her “extracurricular activities.” She was a stable member of the community Budget Committee and of the Financial Advisory Board. She served on the Greensburg Conference Leadership Team and was Chair for Housing and Hospitality for the 1983 Community Assembly. She worked tirelessly at all the Summer Festivals and all the Korean Card Parties. When the summer camp for girls was held at Marymount, she was on the staff; and when it became a vacation home for the sisters, she was in charge for several summers. She made many appeals throughout the United States for the Korean missions, including the month-long adventure in North Dakota, when the Sisters made appeals every weekend in different churches. She was truly a woman for all seasons and in all places.

Throughout the years, Sister Miriam Rita was faithful to her family, caring for her parents as they became older, and then helping her brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews when she was able. She was particularly caring for her sister Aimee’s family of ten children when they were growing up.

When she wasn’t working or volunteering, Sister Miriam Rita was still having a good time and proved adventurous. She loved to swim. She played cards and worked countless jig saw puzzles, often with Sister Therese (Burns). She was a competent driver, a very good cook, and a seamstress. She would go almost anywhere and take on anything. She enjoyed her years in Arizona with the opportunity to see new things. She traveled to California to see nieces and nephews. She went on day trips, made a couple of trips to New England, and was always happy at the shore, especially at her brother Fred’s home in Ocean City, New Jersey.

When Sister Miriam Rita petitioned for final vows in 1948, after six years in the community, she wrote: “My life in the community has been everything I have always wanted . . .” Her prayer life was as deep as her many works. When the first 30-day “Renovation” retreat was planned for sisters who lived in the community for a certain number of years, she was a year ahead of those making the “Renovation” and could not go. So she offered to help cook! The cooks got everything ready and were able to go to all the activities and make what was really a 30-day directed retreat, a pivotal experience in her spiritual life.

Sister Miriam Rita was, certainly, a Sister of Charity who did “whatever was necessary” in many ways for many years. May this “Woman for all Seasons” not forget us as we too strive to build up the Kingdom of God on earth. In the words of the historical Saint Thomas More, the “Man for All Seasons,” we ask, Sister Miriam Rita, “that you pray for us as we will for thee that we may [all] merrily meet in heaven.”

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection  
Sister Brigid Marie Grandey  
September 21, 2015*