

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER MARY ARLEEN SQUITIERI MARCH 14, 1933–AUGUST 20, 2016



Good evening. As we come this evening to bid our final farewell to Sister Mary Arleen, we join in celebration of a life of service which changed and grew throughout her life as she journeyed to find God in the many places where the people of God most needed her. Each one of us here this evening has his or her own particular and special memories of Sister Mary Arleen. It would be interesting to weave these images into the complex and mysterious, secret yet open, interesting and sincere, busy but quiet, loving but private, deep yet fun-loving person who lived with us and shared our journey for 65 years.

We ask the question: “Who was Sister Mary Arleen Squitieri?” The answer comes in a number of ways. First, some facts. Born on March 14, 1933, and baptized Arleen in Saint Peter’s Church, New Kensington, Pennsylvania, she was the only child and very special daughter of Leo and Mary Mancuso Squitieri. Her home was in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh and she attended Sacred Heart High School in East Liberty. During her high school years, she worked in the infirmary section of the Little Sisters of the Poor Home on Penn Avenue and found that her love for the aged grew from these roots. During high school, her favorite saint was Saint Theresa, the Little Flower, and her early inclination toward entering a religious community was to enter the Carmelite Sisters. In addition to Saint Theresa, another favorite saint, in high school and throughout life, was Saint Francis. “How I loved my stay in Assisi—acres of sunflowers from which they make oil . . . visited Saint Francis Basilica where he is buried. And she loved Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton—3/14/33, my birth and 3/14/1805, Mother Seton’s reception into the Catholic Church.”

Sister Mary Arleen was a life-long learner. She received her degree from Seton Hill and she attended workshops, institutes, summer studies, and Elderhostel’s throughout the world and in the United States. All of this appears in her file on two single-spaced typed papers. She also was a proud and active graduate of the first group to join with Sister Gemma Marie and Mary Noël in the Institute for Holocaust studies at Yad Vashem in Israel. She wrote of the experience, “I look at Yad Vashem and I look at the Crucifix . . . I don’t understand either . . . but I kneel before them.”

Did we ever realize how many places Arleen traveled? England, Scotland, Wales, Greece, Rome, Yugoslavia, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Italy, Sicily, and so many of our United States. These trips caused her to reflect on “Old”—seeing and experiencing both the “Old” and the “New.” She wrote during her 1983 retreat:

*Old . . .
What is old?
Things . . .
Places . . .
Aged faces . . .*

*Rings in trees . . .
Hives of bees . . .*

*Shoes with buckles . . .
Arthritic Knuckles . . .*

*Jewels in crowns . . .
Books faded brown . . .*

*Roman races . . .
Faraway places . . .*

*Paths to roam . . .
Tombs unknown . . .*

*Tell me . . .
What is old?*

In her early ministry she served as a primary teacher, and later, she served as a successful principal. She ministered in many schools in the Pittsburgh and Greensburg Dioceses. It is impossible to think of all of the young children who began their journey with books and learning in her skilled and organized classrooms. After attending the Holocaust Institute, she initiated a Seder Celebration with her second graders, and commented that it helped them to get in touch with their spiritual roots and develop a deeper appreciation of the Eucharist.

How many of us has had the opportunity to see Arleen's artistic ability? She liked to sketch you know, and was quite good. How many knew of her love of music, especially of the violin? Her ability to sing? Her poetry? What were her favorite things? Fish, cats, ducks, fawns, birds and sheep. All of God's precious creatures. Flowers and people.

When her teaching career ended she moved into pastoral care with the same enthusiasm and found a whole new life of service. She reflected on that as well. "Loss! A terrible thing but it does have a bright side.

*Closing the school—took me into a ministry I love.
Closing the convent—very difficult but led us to a nice house.
Knee surgery—loss of work time but helped me do my work better.*

Sister Mary Arleen wrote an Article in the July 2002 edition of *Vision*, the National Association of Catholic Chaplains publication. She described how pastoral ministry extends the tradition of our congregation today. We might all reflect on some of the points she made so well in the article. She notes that the Tradition of Charity began with Saint Vincent de Paul. For decades, the largest number of the Congregation of Mother Seton Sisters of Charity, spent their days serving in the parishes.

When the school at Saint Regis in Trafford closed, Sister Mary Arleen hoped that her choice to remain at Saint Regis in a different but needed capacity would demonstrate that parish life encompasses much more than the parish school. Parishes are no longer linked to territory but rather to people and ministry—the continuation of the mission of Christ. As Sister Mary Arleen assumed her new role, she pictured herself as a bridge between the old and the new. Her new position placed her with God's people in need—in their homes, hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice programs. She was now ministering where the hardest and most important decisions were facing those she served. Was it easy? No. Was it rewarding? Yes.

She learned the importance of support and presence in the lives of many parishioners. "My faith is stronger, my hope is fortified, and my charity is extended through my ministry." In the article Sister Mary Arleen wrote that when she was ministering to a dying person she would ask, "What is the name you use for God? What do you want?" Together they would compose a simple prayer, such as, "God let me know your peace." She would print two cards—one for the person and one for herself. The prayer was short, easy to remember, and easy to recite frequently as a way to stay connected to the dying person.

Well, it is time to complete this mosaic of a most complex and deep woman. Sister Mary Arleen's favorite Psalm was:

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me;
He refreshes my soul."*

It concludes:

*“Only goodness and kindness follow me
All the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the
Lord for years to come.”*

Dear Arleen, may you rest well in the arms of the Lord you loved and served so well. May you enjoy the banquet prepared along with your parents, loved ones, and special friend, Sister Mary Inez. And remember your group members who continue to journey in this life toward the reward for which we all long.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Louise Grundish, SC
August 23, 2016*