

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER MIRIAM DOLORES SELL February 19, 1923–May 25, 2017

*I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.
2 Timothy 4:7*



As we gather to celebrate the life of Sister Miriam Dolores Sell, I can almost hear her exclaiming these words! What joy she experiences as her long course is ended and she has indeed “kept the faith.”

Sister Miriam Dolores grew up in Mount Oliver in Pittsburgh, the daughter of John and Amelia Litz Sell.

Sister Miriam Dolores had three brothers, Wilbert, Ray and Leo, all deceased now, and one sister, Ann, who is here with us. The Sell family were members of Saint Joseph Parish, known as the German church. We all know that Sister Miriam Dolores was very proud of her German heritage!

From an early age, Sister Miriam Dolores felt a call to serve God and people as a religious. There was some thought that she was too small and thin to enter, but she was determined, and entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill on September 8, 1940. Her life and work were defined by these two qualities: love of God and determination.

Sister Miriam Dolores began her ministry teaching elementary school, usually seventh or eighth grade. She was not only an excellent teacher, but maintained perfect order in the classroom, determined that the students would learn.

In 1970, Sister Miriam Dolores was missioned to Elizabeth Seton High School in Pittsburgh, beginning a forty-year-career as a social studies teacher. Four years after going to Elizabeth Seton, she completed a master's degree in history at Duquesne University, a program she had started several years before. She was able to pick up the work again, take the courses and pass the examinations to complete the degree.

In 1979, when Elizabeth Seton High School, a school for girls, owned by the Sisters of Charity, merged with South Hills Catholic High School, a school for boys operated by the Christian Brothers, Sister Miriam Dolores was a charter member of the new Seton LaSalle Catholic High School faculty, teaching history and social studies until her retirement in 2011.

In the early days of Seton LaSalle, the boys “tested” the sisters and other women teachers who had come from Elizabeth Seton. That didn't work with “Sister Dolores,” as the students called her. Determined that all students would learn she ran a classroom truly dedicated to education, and a “tight ship,” eventually creating a fine rapport with all the students. She is remembered until the present time for her strict enforcement of the dress code: she would stand at the top of the stairs near her classroom with a pad of detention slips in hand to greet the students. “When there are rules, they get enforced,” she said. I wonder if the students realized that she was enforcing rules to make them better Christian men and women, to help them lead good lives for the love of God.

Sister Miriam Dolores was well-liked by students and faculty at Seton La Salle. She in turn said that what she liked best about the school was the students and faculty. She loved teaching all the students, but took special delight in the Honors classes, particularly Advanced Placement European History. The students appreciated “Sister Dolores” too. One said, “She makes

her students work hard and to their potential.” Another said, “She gets our tests checked and ready for us the next day.” And a third, referring to a “best kept secret,” her sense of humor, “she spices up every class with her dry wit.”

During her years at Seton La Salle, Sister Miriam Dolores received a plaque for over 25 years of service in Catholic education, and the Jim Palmer award, named for a former principal, and given for dedication to education and love for students. A celebration was held for her retirement and she was featured in the magazine section of the Pittsburgh Catholic diocesan newspaper.

Sister Miriam Dolores demonstrated dedication and love for others not only in her professional life, but also in her life as a Sister of Charity and in her relationships with others. She was a very fine seamstress, sewing not only for herself but very often for other sisters or friends. She was good at building maintenance, directing a work-study program for students at Elizabeth Seton High School. At Elizabeth Seton Convent, she knew where the pipes and electrical wires were and what to do in an emergency. She seemed to always be there when a Sister was moving in or out of the convent or needed other help. Her artistic talents were shown in many ways, especially when she and Sister Judy McKenna worked together to decorate the convent dining room. She learned to drive when she was a little older: that took determination. She liked going to Conneaut Lake and to the ocean. She liked to travel and made trips to Charleston, to Colorado, to Maine, to Alaska and to the lands of her heritage, Germany and Austria. She liked to read, watch detective programs on television and work crossword puzzles.

Sister Miriam Dolores’ love of God and life of service extended easily to family members. She was interested in and devoted to her nieces and nephews, maybe especially to Ann’s sons Rick and Kerry. She even stayed

with them occasionally during their parents' absence and would demonstrate her considerable cooking skills.

As Sister Miriam Dolores moved from full to part time teaching and then to retirement, she had more time to help in the house at Elizabeth Seton Convent. Not for her a life of ease! She was up every morning for the 6:15 Mass. All the little things that no one thinks about, Sister Miriam Dolores did. She ordered the milk and the coffee, distributed the mail, set the tables for dinner.

Always, whatever was needed in the house, at school or for her family, Sister Miriam Dolores did with love.

The course is finished now and "there is reserved for you [Miriam] the crown which the Lord will give."

Sister Brigid Marie Grandey
Funeral Liturgy Reflection
May 30, 2017