

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER SHEILA MARIE COOPER March 25, 1931–September 16, 2018



The sharing last night took away my thunder so please accept a few ripples.

Catherine Dolores Cooper entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, September 8, 1950. The daughter of Sidney and Dolores Cooper received the name of Sister Sheila Marie on March 19, 1950.

Sister Sheila Marie loved her brother Bob. Bob you have our deepest sympathy. Rob, Lauren, Chris, and little ones, you all meant so much to Sister. She loved your phone calls and the visits to your home. She described every nook and cranny. She enjoyed hearing about your children and the additions to their families. She really loved your dog, Penny. Rob said she probably could have ridden Penny.

Sister Sheila Marie taught school in Pittsburgh, Greensburg, and the Archdiocese of Washington. She also worked at Seton Center where she coordinated special programs for the children. We also heard how she developed the drama program at Carlow Campus School.

The song “I Could Have Danced All Night” could give one an idea of Sister Sheila’s favorite recreation. She loved to dance. School and parish functions where music was provided found Sister Sheila Marie moving with the music.

She did graduate work in theater and creative arts. She was very proud of her accomplishments and really used what she had learned. She helped with all school productions, especially Living Stations. She helped choreograph the prayerful dances performed by the girls.

At the time of her Golden Jubilee, the children took the number 50 and used chocolate kisses covered in gold to represent 50 years of service. Each kiss represented a characteristic that the children felt described Sister. I will not subject you to all fifty, but give you a sampling, in alphabetical order:

Amazing, beautiful, caring, dancer, efficient, friendly, generous, peaceful, religious, spectacular, talented, extraordinary, youthful, and zippy.

It is so true that out of the mouths of children comes the truth. The children recognized the special person—Sister Sheila Marie.

These were Sister's words at the time of her Jubilee:

"I celebrate this Year of Jubilee thanking God for having called me to journey with the Sisters of Charity where I have been challenged to share my gifts and talents, creating ways of expressing the presence of God's love to those to whom and with whom I minister."

She really did accept the challenge in so many ways.

Working in the Word of God School Library gave her many opportunities to minister to the children and teachers. If she knew a certain topic was being discussed, all the books on that subject appeared on a table. The teacher didn't escape because Sister would show up at her door with additional materials.

We never know how we affect people. One mother told me that her daughter loved a certain book and borrowed it many times. When she graduated from the eighth grade, Sister gave her the book. She was so touched that Sister remembered.

Another mother, who is here for Mass, shared how Sister was so supportive of her daughter who was very artistic. Sister took time to talk to her about her gifts. Today this girl is at Carnegie Mellon and designed a play area at the Children's Museum where, of all things, they can create rainbows.

How many stories could be told!

One could say Sister was quietly effective. She even volunteered on the Wedding Committee (Word of God Parish) and helped with the little things that made weddings beautiful and calmed many a bride.

It was Sister's idea to move to Caritas Christi. She found it a challenge to adjust to the large number having lived with only three people in the house. She would say to me, "I'm just an introvert".

I know you all know how she loved to walk. She walked many streets in Swissvale and touched many lives. Not only did she make many friends, she knew the name of every dog in Swissvale and they all knew her. She carried special treats for them. I hope she has a puppy in heaven. It was her apostolate of the sidewalk.

You might say she also had an apostolate of the bus. She went everywhere by bus and made friends. One day she returned home upset because the lady who usually sat beside her wasn't on the bus. So of course we had to pray for her.

Father John, Pastor at Word of God, referred to Sister Sheila Marie in his homily Tuesday. If you recall the reading was on the Body of Christ. He said St. Therese, the Little Flower, thought of herself as part of the Heart of Christ. He said that as he reflected on the life of Sister Sheila Marie, he thought of Sister as the Feet of Christ. He said she didn't just lumber along, she moved with determination. He recalled how she was in the middle of a group of young people at one of the galas doing the Electric Slide. He finished by saying she was a holy woman.

Whenever I would drop in her room to ask a favor or just to talk, I would find her praying the Rosary.

When Sister was told she was being placed on hospice she joyfully responded, "I am going to see Jesus." And Jesus said, "Save the last dance for me."

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Mary Victor Powers
September 20, 2018*