

EULOGY FOR RUTH SCHWALENBERG, DMJ

Sr. Ruth Schwalenberg, also known as Sr. Marie Valentine, was born on November 5, 1931 in Baltimore, Maryland. Or, as Ruth would say: "Ballimore". Her immediate family was small: her parents, Herman Valentine Schwalenberg and Anna Marie Wright, and her older sister, Thérèse Martin, DMJ, but she had numerous cousins, both in Maryland and Massachusetts. Because of her father's employment, Ruth and her family moved several times, first to CA, then to Kansas City, MO and back again to California where she graduated from St. Paul the Apostle Elementary School and Marymount High School in Westwood.

While attending Mount St. Mary's College in Brentwood, Ruth met Lois Clariborne, with whom she shared some of her classes. It was Lois who introduced Ruth to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. Ruth entered the Community on August 2, 1950 and took the name in Religion of Marie Valentine, in honor of her parents, whose Christian and family values guided her throughout her life.

Upon leaving the novitiate, Ruth began her teaching ministry while resuming her studies at Mount St. Mary's College, graduating with a BA in Spanish. She then earned an MA in Spanish at San Francisco College for Women, followed at a later date with an MA in Hispanic Pastoral Ministry from Incarnate Word College in San Antonio, Texas. These studies prepared her not only for her time at Bishop Conaty High School but greatly influenced her life-long love and service within Hispanic culture.

Ruth's desire to learn new things and to discover their deeper meaning seemed to permeate her life in so many ways. She was a voracious reader with a tremendous capacity to remember and integrate into her life whatever she read--whether it was her delving into and reflecting on the writings of St. Paul, or her love of chemistry and discovering all the elements that were a part of everything's DNA, or enjoying the magnificent beauty of God's creation that she saw radiated in nature and others. And, as always, whatever insights or discoveries she made, Ruth couldn't keep these to herself but she enthusiastically and eagerly shared them with others, and in doing so, igniting our desire and curiosity to see what she saw and to experience what she experienced.

"Wholeheartedness" may be one way to express Ruth's approach to life. To quote Pema Chôdrôn, *"wholeheartedness is a precious gift, but no one can actually give it to you. You have to find the path that has heart and then walk it impeccably...challenging you to figure out what to do when you don't know what to do."*

Ruth was truly wholehearted in all that she did:

As a woman of deep faith and prayer, Ruth was vibrantly alive and open to the creative and prophetic spirit within and around her. The songs “*De Colores*” and “*Laudato Si*” celebrate Ruth’s experience of God’s love, graciousness and mercy for her and for the whole world. Ruth shared her joy of life with all of us, either in person and/or through the written word, especially in the innumerable cards that she sent to so many DMJ’s and others for many different occasions. And always with a song in her heart and often one on her lips!!

As a teacher, she saw in her students each one’s uniqueness, beauty and possibilities, welcoming, supporting and believing in them as they were, and challenging them to “follow their dreams”. One of Ruth’s former students reminisced: “the inspiration, the excitement, the spirit of God and the fun that she brought to us as students, and the life path she set us on—will never be forgotten and is deeply, deeply appreciated.”

In parish ministry, Ruth was asked to serve as Pastoral Associate/Coordinator, especially working with the Hispanic community in various parishes. Her pastoral experience as a missionary in Brazil along with her studies in Rome during Vatican II shaped her understanding of Church--as the People of God. Ruth envisioned her ministry as helping the faith community to articulate its vision/mission in the light of the Gospel and to develop the leadership and ministries needed to carry out the mission of Christ within the parish. Believing in the ability of the people to positively respond to the workings of the Spirit among them, Ruth went into each situation with the full intention of “working myself out of a job”.

As a member of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, Ruth had a deep and profound love for the Community and for the Founder. Her spirit of joy, hospitality and welcome permeated her life and “spilled over onto all around her”. Always very generous in spirit, Ruth left her missionary work in Brazil when she was called to Rome to become our Congregational Leader, where she embraced this new ministry of leadership. Ruth was convinced that the renewal of the Church and Religious Life begun by Pope John XXIII in Vatican II should be our vision and life as well.

In her 1970 letter of acceptance as Congregational Leader, Ruth wrote: “*To be re-newed must be our first concern, collectively, as a congregation, and individually as the members who make up that congregation.*”

And so, with this vision, Ruth wholeheartedly guided us on this unknown path of renewal:

--to be able to see where we needed to go, it was important that we could re-discover the spirit and the charism of the Congregation—"what makes us tick". Deeply reflecting on the Gospel and searching the writings of our Founder, Ruth launched us on the long process of re-writing our Constitutions, challenging us to state simply and profoundly who we were called to be as DMJs. That document, our Constitutions, completed and approved in 1984, continues to this day to inspire and challenge us to be and live who we say we are.

--having experienced the life and vitality of our Sisters throughout the Congregation, it was Ruth's desire for all of us in our small Congregation to get to know one another, so that we could develop a better sense of belonging to an international congregation. It was from this desire that Ruth and her team instigated the international Plenaries, to which all of us were encouraged to attend. The impact of these gatherings truly created a strong sense of our being one international family!

--because this vision of renewal was not only about who we were as DMJs, but it was also about our ability to respond to the needs of the changing world, Ruth continually prompted and strongly urged us to read, digest, share and live the documents of Vatican II, opening our hearts and minds to new ways of seeing and being. For example:

--defining education as *that which transforms* society, Ruth, in expanding our understanding and ministry of education, encouraged us to look beyond the classroom to discover new ways of being educators

--through Vatican II's emphasis for "the preferential option of the poor" and from Ruth's experience of living and working with the poor, especially in Brazil, we were challenged to broaden our horizons for ministry as a congregation, and for us here in CA, to volunteer for missions outside of CA. If someone would say to Ruth, "I would like to do this work, or why weren't we DMJs going to these people or doing this ministry", Ruth would respond: "What are you waiting for? Go do it!!"

As one DMJ wrote, Ruth moved us forward even if we did not like moving!! She really had a particularly lively and convincing way with anything she presented!

As her health declined and she was no longer able to freely go to visit the her homeless friends at the local McDonald's, or to walk along the ocean where she rejoiced in God's glory, Ruth tried to make the best of what each day brought her way. Sometimes, it was not easy for her, and she struggled to keep open to her situation—but eventually she would return to her positive spirit of wholeheartedly (as best as she could) living in the present moment.

Ruth was for us a friend, a sister, a teacher, a mentor, a supporter, a model. As she did with her students, she met each of us as we were, and nudged us to be a little more of who we could be. Always the visionary, even in her last weeks when she was quite weak, Ruth would continue to challenge us with her words: *“Come on! Come on! Let’s go! Let’s go!!”*

She loved the word ALLELUIA. ALLELUIA was her life; ALLELUIA was her song!!

Ruth has shared her light and visions with us and now she has returned to the LIGHT from which she has come.