

EULOGY for Sr. Charlene Ross RSM
July 11, 2019
By Sister Jeanne Christensen, RSM

Good morning. Welcome to the celebration of Sr. Charlene's life.

As you know from reading our community's "Celebrating the Life," Sr. Charlene lived a full and generous life of Mercy in community and ministry.

When I asked people how they would describe Charlene, their responses not only rang true but also spoke of similar characteristics. Some of the characteristics seemed to be in contradiction to one another – for example, her close friend Sister of St. Joseph, Marilyn Peot spoke of Charlene as a woman who was more than one-step ahead of most of us, with a keen discernment that gave her insight into Truth. She said, "I am amazed at her 'heart-knowing'; she has had an impact on my spiritual walk in very subtle but deep ways." A former student, now one of our good diocesan priests described his "Charlene forever moment" this way: "Sr. Charlene was a stickler for singing properly. And I, as a 13 year-old boy with a voice like a frog, didn't always make her standard. She, in her own way, told me to mouth it in choir. When I returned to St. Peter's as Pastor, she was still there tutoring. At my reception following a Sunday mass, I walked over to her and introduced myself as her former student. She looked at me a bit quizzically and said, "I didn't think you'd amount to much. Guess you surprised me."

Some of us knew Charlene for her diligence and intensity for whatever task she had and that she was an avid reader and deep thinker. Others of us experienced her compassion, delicious meals and gracious hospitality. She was honest, straightforward, opinionated and respected by her students even though the junior high boys called her Chuck behind her back! She told me I'd have a hard time in religious life because I was too frank – gosh, was she speaking from experience???

She was a faithful friend especially to Sr. Joan Marie, for whom she was also a caregiver. She moved from her beloved Kansas City to Omaha to accompany Joan Marie in her last days. Many years ago, she invited to Sr. Cecilianne Dant, another close friend, to live with us at St. Peter's during her recuperation time.

Charlene was an extraordinary teacher! She taught many subjects, but music was her first love. She motivated junior high boys to be cantors, pianists and choir members. One of her former students is a well-known jazz musician in Kansas City. When she retired from the classroom, she tutored students, believing every child deserved the best chance to succeed. Of course, she formed her own tutoring business and it was successful. Parents and students were grateful for her assistance.

She was an accomplished pianist and music brought her joy. She shared her knowledge and talent in a variety of ways – as a member of local choirs, a mentor in the Young Organist Program and participating in Liturgical Conferences as well as ministering in classrooms and parishes.

We might ask, what made Charlene tick? She could be compassionate, deeply spiritual, generous, gracious; and yet, opinionated, have high expectations of others, be blunt and even sometimes tough. I believe she listened to the heartbeat of God, to the wisdom of the Spirit within. She lived with integrity, love and a deep commitment to Mercy.

John Philip Newell in his book, “Listening for the Heartbeat of God,” describes Charlene at her deepest self. He said, “The concept of listening for the heartbeat of God within all things, ourselves, one another and the whole of Creation is a feature of spirituality.” (Adapted) She sought God’s presence in the whole of life instead of almost exclusively within the Church and its traditions. She loved the Church, but she was disheartened by its defects. You could count on a robust but always respectful conversation with her about the Church and sometimes the Mercy Community.

She was sometimes misunderstood and sometimes angry; but was she a mystic? I think so, if you define mystic as one who would rather go more deeply into life, to find God at the heart of life, deeper than any wrong, and to liberate God’s goodness within us and in our relationships, both individually and collectively. I think, too, she practiced listening for God within the whole of life. Charlene lived a life of contemplation and faithful action. I think she would agree with John Philip Newell who said, “If the Church’s symbols and rituals pointed more clearly to the world as God’s dwelling place, we might then more fully rediscover that

God's heartbeat can be heard in the whole of life and at the heart of our own lives, if we will only listen." (p107)

A closing prayer, "A Veil Thin as Gossamer" by George MacLeod, language adapted.

Triune God, in the midst of us as we give thanks for those who have gone from the sight of earthly eyes, Thy in your nearer presence, still worship with us in the mystery of the one family in heaven and on earth...

If it is your holy will, then tell them how much we love them, and how we miss them, and how we long for the day when we shall meet with them again...

Strengthen us to go on in loving service of all our children. Then shall we have communion with you, and, in you, with our beloved ones. Then shall we come to know within ourselves that there is no death and that only a veil divides, thin as gossamer.