

Reflection for Sister Miriam Richard Soisson

August 21, 1929 – November 11, 2023



“To enjoy, we must love, and to love, we must sacrifice.”
Sister Miriam Richard modeled these words of St.
Elizabeth Ann Seton throughout her life.

How and where has she shared this love and sacrifice?

Her sister, Sister Mary Clifford, once told me that “Lois was the sweetest baby” when she arrived in our family on August 21, 1929 – 94 years ago! Three big brothers Albert, Clifford (Father Cliff), and Richard, and three older sisters, Jean Beatty, Anna Mae Soisson Dickason, and Eileen, our Sister Mary Clifford showered love on her. Sister Mary Clifford also shared that her “little sister, Lois, was the joy of her parents, Albert and Susan.” Her many nieces and nephews with their families have shared a reciprocal joy and love through the years. The surprise party to celebrate her jubilee and birthday in September certainly proved that.

When Lois told her family 75 years ago that her “love to serve was an invitation from God to enter the Sisters of Charity”, she had the support of a loving caring family.

A bachelor’s degree in sociology and history from Seton Hill University and a master’s degree in education and guidance counseling from the University of Arizona prepared her to be a resolute teacher and administrator in Altoona, Johnstown, Greensburg, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, Tucson, and Chandler for 36 years. Her former students, whom she called “my boys”, came annually from Homestead to visit with her at Caritas Christi.

The late 1960’s, which continued her love, openness, and willingness to serve where needed, took her to New Orleans where she participated in a faculty exchange program between the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill and the Holy Family Sisters of New Orleans, a program implemented to combat racial prejudice, by integrating students and faculty.

A master’s degree in education and guidance counseling from the University of Arizona and a certificate as a reality therapist and a bereavement facilitator, led her to her final twenty-one years of ministry at St. Mary-Basha Elementary School in Chandler, Arizona. The joy of ministering as a counselor for students and their families along with faculty and staff helped to spread the love in Elizabeth Seton’s words, “To enjoy, we must love.”

The final part of Elizabeth Seton’s quote, “and to love, we must sacrifice” became a reality when her health changed, and it became evident that her new ministry would be at Caritas Christi. When she left the warmth of Arizona to come to Greensburg before Thanksgiving in 2008, I assured her that the trees would still be sharing autumn beauty when we flew into Pittsburgh.

God's humor provided a heavy snow, which with her quiet humor, she reminded me about that trip every Thanksgiving.

Sister Miriam Richard's desire to continue sharing love with joy, found a new ministry as she assisted executive assistant, Kathy Verdone, at De Paul Center. Those experiences led to a lasting friendship with Kathy. She also collaborated with Sister Mary Florence Scott and assumed the ministry with the Elizabeth Ann Seton Guild. She continued the work of the Guild while sacrificing with continued failing eyesight. Her creativity led to new cards and invitations to consider prayer as an alternative to gifts. If you received the cards, you know she spent extra moments writing a personal note with the cards and she secured the envelopes with layers of scotch tape. We wondered if she had stock with Scotch tape!

Reflecting on her life as a Sister of Charity, Sister Miriam Richard said, "It has become more evident to me over the years the meaning of 'I am.' God is definitely in the present. When one is able to be aware of His Presence, there will be contentment, happiness, and acceptance. Let go of the past, fear not the future, and live in the present—His Presence."

The readings Sister chose for this celebration of her life reflect the presence of God with contentment, happiness, and acceptance.

She lived the words of Paul to the Corinthians, "Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not boast or brag. There is no arrogance in love; it is never rude—it is not self-absorbed."

She was patient with her changing health challenges and continued to think of others with kindness...a trip to the Dollar Tree to buy candy or nuts to give to the sisters on their birthdays, or Poppycock for her doctor and staff, or mint candy for the nurses who were so good to her and the list goes on! Last evening, we heard these words about Aunt Lois, empathetic, compassionate, non-judgmental, gentle, kind, respectful, and she probably smiled humbly as she listened.

Always concerned about others, she waited for her goddaughter and niece, Susan, to come from Arizona, and then she went peacefully to God with her "yes," leaving us with the words in John's Gospel, "Do not let your hearts be troubled; have faith in God."

Rest in God's loving arms, dear Miriam. Your parents, big brothers, and sisters, and all whose lives have been touched by your kindness and love, are with God planning for your arrival. Elizabeth Seton will be there to thank you as one of her Daughters who enjoyed, loved, and sacrificed.

Grace Hartzog, SC
November 15, 2023