

## Sister Rosemarie Di Censo

St. Vincent de Paul taught, “We must always do things with the greatest possible simplicity.” Sister Rosemarie Di Censo lives that teaching. Sister Rosemarie can be counted upon to give a straight answer, find a direct solution, and jump in to accomplish the task at hand. Her no-fuss approach to life, combined with a generosity of spirit and a quick wit, make her a friend who can be depended upon and a gift to all who know her.



As you might guess from speaking with her, Sister Rosemarie is a native Bostonian. Her parents both immigrated to the United States from Italy and were proud to be Americans. Sister Rosemarie recalls that the Fourth of July always held special meaning for her mother, who witnessed Fourth of July fireworks from the boat entering New York Harbor when she first came to America. Sister Rosemarie says that her parents were “two strong Christian people who always wanted the best for their children and who always gave to others in any way that they could.”

Rosemarie and her younger brother and sister were taught by the Sisters of Saint Joseph in grammar school. Rosemarie remembers “playing nun” as a little girl and says that she and three or four close friends all said that they wanted to be nuns when they grew up. As she got older, her experience with nuns grew to include the Sisters of Charity who taught her in high school. She greatly admired these sisters and was drawn to join them and enter the Sisters of Charity following high school graduation. Her decision in part rested upon the assurance she received that she could be assigned to care for children at an orphanage and would not have to be trained to be a teacher or a nurse. (She joked that her father told her that she moved too slowly to be a nurse; “he said that the patients would be dead by the time I would get to them!”)

Sister Rosemarie recalls traveling to Convent Station for the first time with her parents to begin her new life. “We had no clue where we were going and we kept slowing the car to look for signs that said the word, ‘station.’” They eventually found the Motherhouse and Rosemarie settled into life as a postulant. She was much distressed to learn that she would indeed be trained to be a teacher to help meet the need for sisters in burgeoning Catholic schools. She remembers attending education classes at the College of Saint Elizabeth at a time when the young sisters, in full habit, were instructed to sit in the back of classrooms apart from the lay students.

Sister Rosemarie was sent out to begin her ministry in primary school education and despite her early reservations, she found that she loved teaching. She taught first grade at Saint Bridget Elementary School in Jersey City and later taught third grade at St. John’s School in New Haven, CT before teaching second grade for 26 years at Saint Mary School in Newington, CT. (She says she was relieved to be assigned to second grade instead of kindergarten. “I’m not really artsy crafty and didn’t want Jack and Jill!”)

Sister Rosemarie loved and encouraged all her students, but she found that she was especially drawn to the students who struggled with learning. A fixture of her classroom was a framed needlework picture of three soldiers, one of whom was upside down. The text over the picture read, “Nobody’s Perfect.” This became a motto to the students in Sister Rosemarie’s classroom, who were encouraged to get up and keep trying and not be devastated by imperfection or the inevitable setbacks of life.

In 2003, Sister Rosemarie moved back to New Jersey to participate in the Sisters in Transition program at St. Joseph's Hospital in Wayne and later, Paterson. She served in various ministries at the Hospital for eleven years. She enjoyed relating to people -- patients, staff, medical students -- and sharing a little hope and humor. She says, "Some of the patients' rooms in Wayne had a beautiful panoramic view of all the changing leaves on the trees in the hills. I would say, 'Did they tell you that you had to pay extra for this room?' They'd say, 'Are you kidding me?'"

After eleven years at St. Joseph's, Sister Rosemarie returned to Convent Station to live in the Motherhouse. She immediately looked to serve in a new ministry and soon joined the Development Office to help process and acknowledge donations and assist at events. As an active member of the Motherhouse community, she often volunteers to drive other sisters for appointments or shopping and readily jumps in to help those sisters who sometimes need assistance with daily tasks.

She says, "If I see something that needs to be done or something that I can do for someone, I'll do it. I like to give, but it's not as easy for me to receive." She has always lived a very simple lifestyle unencumbered by "things" and she has a talent and passion for organizing and decluttering. "I have what I need and I don't collect. I have lived simply for so long that it's just second nature to me."

Sister Rosemarie draws the strength that keeps her going and giving from her faith, rooted in her personal prayer life and her daily prayer with other sisters. She says, "I talk to God a lot. And I see God in nature and in people." She is buoyed by joyful worship and is especially energized by upbeat music.

Thankful for the blessings that God has given her, Sister Rosemarie believes in living one day at a time. Her approach to life and ministry as a Sister of Charity might be symbolized by an enduring image she remembers from a book presented once at a directed retreat. "There was someone holding out an empty basket, as if to say to God, 'Give me all that you want me to do, and I'll do whatever I can.'" Taking one day at a time and reminding herself that nobody's perfect, Sister Rosemarie strives to continue to do whatever she can for God and for others.