

Remembering My ‘American Mother’ Sister Rose Gallagher

I often talk to my friends about this woman whom I have known for more than 30 years and called my American mother. It’s a long story, I will tell you only pieces of it to give you a sense of who Sister Rose was to my family and me.

When I received the sad news last week about her passing, I felt very sad, but I quickly realized that I should not be sad. I should instead celebrate her! We all should celebrate her! She lived her life according to God’s Words. She is in Heaven!

I can say she is in Heaven because I am a witness of how She lived the Words of God through Compassion and Friendship.

These two words – compassion and friendship – have been the anchors of Sister Rose’s life with my family and anyone in the Haitian community she came in contact with during her life on this earth.

It was Sister Rose’s compassion that led her to become a fierce advocate of a group of farmworkers from Haiti who left their families behind in search of a better life in the United States. At the time, the farmworkers (all men) spoke no English. Their rights were being abused by their bosses in the 1980s. My father was among these farmworkers.

Her compassion never waned. In places where Sister Rose could not help, her compassion led her to find other people to help. She helped the men find permanent jobs in Roanoke, Virginia. They became U.S. citizens in the 1990s and 2000s. As a result of Sister Rose’s compassion, caring, and tireless work, the men brought their families to the United States for a better life.

I am one of the children who benefited from Sister Rose’s compassion. When I arrived in the U.S. at 17 years old in 1991, Sister Rose helped me enroll in high school. In college, she helped me find an internship in Washington, DC, and a place to stay. I now hold a PhD. Sister Rose was (and is) a part of who I am today.

Friendship: Sister Rose remained in our lives all throughout the years. She would always check in to see how we were doing. She would visit whenever she could, and would always be there to lend an ear. She was always optimistic, and believed in the power of prayer to make people and life better.

As the Lord has called her home, we remember her, we celebrate her, and we are grateful that God had shared her with us. In us, she lives.

With Love, Rest in Peace, Sister Rose

[Figaro Joseph]
