



REMEMBERING AND CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF SISTER ROSE GALLAGHER

June 5, 1934-June 11, 2014

Welcome. Byenveni toutmoun!

We gather to remember and celebrate the life of Sister Rose Gallagher. Who was this woman? Why are so many Haitians here today? You will have a chance to share the answer to these questions. But first a little bit of history.

It was in 1981 that Rose along with myself and Sister Frankie Barber met Haitians in the migrant camps around Chilhowie. You were picking apples in the orchards of Bonham Brothers. Life was very difficult. Housing and the food were terrible, and crew leaders were even cheating you of your wages. We took this injustice to the US Congress, testifying before the House Sub-Committee on Labor Relations, and we won that case! Money was returned to you.

In October of that year 1981, Philogene Israel asked us to help some of you to leave the camps. When Sister Rose heard this she said: "How can we say no to Israel?" And so, in the dead of night we took eight of you out of the camps: Verna Alexis, Najuge Joseph, Antoine Etienne, Frisnel Joseph, L'Herrison Siede, Elibrieul Balizage, Max Mondisir, Philogene Israel. After a few days we took you here to Roanoke. Of these eight, only Frisnel spoke English. Rose and I spoke no Kreyol. In time, Rose and I learned the Kreyol language and began going to Haiti. We met your families in St. Marc and Leogane and Cite Soleil. We became one family – and Sister Rose took on a new identity as Mother to you and to the country of Haiti. Haiti became her life passion. Remember how you called us Mummy Woz and Mummy Del?

Just as Jesus gathered disciples around himself as he proclaimed the Kingdom of God, so there were many others who helped. And so we remember: Father Tom Caroluzza, who welcomed the eight of you to Our Lady of Nazareth. Nazareth became home – you even lived in the rectory with Father Tom for three months until housing and jobs could be found. Bishop Walter Sullivan then helped purchase the House of Hope – where Verna lives today. Sister Jeanne Morin came to help me teach English. More Haitians came until today more than a thousand live in Roanoke.

All this has taken place because Sister Rose took a leap of faith. But her leap of faith is really part two of the story that began for most Haitians, including you, in 1980 when you were fleeing the oppression of the Duvalier regime. You risked your lives in small rickety boats. There were some dishonest ship captains who took your money. Some even threw Haitians overboard. Many Haitians did not make the journey alive. For those of you who did Sister Rose felt it was very important to write the story down for your children and grandchildren. This dream of Sister Rose is unfulfilled. We have to be satisfied that it is written in God's book of Life, in a perfect heaven where Sister Rose rests today.

But today, we remember and celebrate the life and meaning of Sister Rose Gallagher, a woman of faith, courage, compassion and fierce advocacy for the people of Haiti. You are proof that Rose lived and Rose lives on in you. For this we give thanks and celebrate Sister Rose as we continue now in prayer.

Reflections by Adele DellaValle-Rauth