

Vigil Reflection
12 January 2024
Carmelita MacNeil, pbvm
2 September 1940 - 23 December 2023

By Betty Rae Lee, pbvm
NL Province Leader

Laetitia Mary MacNeil was born in Stephenville on 2 September 1940. The choice of her name, Laetitia, originally from the Latin, means joy, happiness, delight and no doubt expressed the feelings of her parents, Neil and Genita Gallant MacNeil at the birth of their first born, the beginning of a large and devoted family. To say Carmelita loved her family would be an understatement. Kay Rex writes: *"Carmelita was the oldest of the family and loved beyond measure."* You all know that your sister adored each and every one of you and we are delighted that you are here with us at this sacred moment of letting go.

Laetitia entered our community on 14 September 1957, made first profession to the vowed life in 1960, receiving the name, Sister Mary Carmelita, and made final profession on 15 July 1965. Carmelita said good-bye to her earthly life on 23 December 2023 to be welcomed with open arms by her God and those who had gone before her.

Much of Carmelita's ministry was spent in the educational field and her time as teacher and principal took her to Cape St. George, Grand Falls, Harbour Breton, Mount Carmel, Mount Pearl, Placentia, St. John's and Trepassey. After her career in education, Carmelita ministered at Xavier House, our home in Corner Brook for adults with complex mental health issues. She also spent many years in pastoral ministry and parish administration in Bird Cove, Buchans, Cape St. George, and Piccadilly. While in Piccadilly, Carmelita received the Air Canada Heart of Gold Award which *"recognizes the efforts of residents who have volunteered their knowledge, expertise and wisdom to help others in a very special way."* When Carmelita left St. Theresa's Parish in Buchans, the parishioners penned this tribute:

*"She came to St. Theresa's to serve us,
a service second to none,
a Sister dear to the hearts of us all
and a kind friend to everyone."*

From 2002 until her move to the Motherhouse in February 2020, Carmelita relished her work in the catechetical programs in Deer Lake and Pasadena. Archbishop Hundt: *"Sister Carmelita was a very involved and beloved catechist om the Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador during my time there. My most vivid and fondest memories of her were her presence and enthusiastic participation in the diocesan Catechetical workshops"*. Bishop Bart remembers, *"I was struck by the way the people of Deer Lake and Pasadena bade her a fond farewell when she left our diocese."*

From my impressions, her ministry was joy-filled and firmly directed towards the person to whom she ministered. The Diocese and its people are richer for her many years of ministry among us and she will be remembered and missed."

Carmelita – a woman with a radiant smile. The people with whom she ministered loved her simplicity and warm hugs. The Associates thought the world of her. They saw her going into dementia, but they held on to all she taught them." Sharon Evans, on behalf of the Deer Lake Associates writes, *"Sister Carmelita was our leader, mentor and guide whom we loved deeply."*

We can all testify that Laetitia/Carmelita brought joy, gladness and delight to those around her. Yet, parallel to that, Carmelita also experienced dark moments of uncertainty, doubt and suffering. Darkness, emptiness, frailty, strength, light, fullness – all part of her earthly journey, Despite the shadows Carmelita had faith that the God she trusted was with her on the journey.

As we honor Carmelita today, I use the words of Irish poet, John O' Donahue, *"On the Death of the Beloved"*:

*Carmelita, now you dwell
inside the realm of breath
as close to us as we are to ourselves
and when orchids brighten the earth
darkest winter has turned to spring
May this darkness flower with hope
in every heart that loves you.*

Rest in deep peace, Carmelita.