

**Vigil (and Church) Reflection**  
**Betty Rae Lee, pbvm**  
**April 25, 1942 – March 27, 2025**  
**By Sharon Fagan, pbvm**  
**Congregational Leader (Union of Presentation Sisters, Ireland)**

As we come together today to celebrate this Eucharist of thanksgiving for the life of Sr Betty Rae, her birth family and her Presentation family are most grateful to all who are joining us. While the suddenness of her death has left us with heavy hearts, we are comforted in knowing that she completed her earth journey surrounded by the blessings of love that were shown to her by the presence of her family and prayers of the Sisters at the Motherhouse during her last days as well as by the comfort care provided by the nursing staff. Betty Rae assured many of us with that she was *at Peace* with her dying. With that awareness we celebrate her life today.

As we gather, I am conscious of many people throughout the world who are also joining us through live streaming. We are grateful to so many of you who have sent words of sympathy and expressions of gratitude for Betty Rae who touched all of our lives and left an indelible legacy through her life of compassion and generous service.

While I am aware that each one of us carry our personal memories of Betty Rae, I would like to recall her life as a Presentation Sister.

Elizabeth Rachael was born in 1942 in the community of St. Mary's, St Mary's Bay, NL, to her parents Owen and Frances Lee and she grew up, called Betty Rae, in a large family where she was nurtured in love and faith. She was educated by our Presentation Sisters and during those years she gained self-confidence and courage to follow the path she believed herself called to journey. At the end of her high school, she received a scholarship and was off to spend a year at Memorial University to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher.

At the tender age of 18 her dream continued to unfold, and she joined the

Presentation Congregation in 1960. After one year she became a Novice and was given the name of Sr Mary Bernarda. Her first assignment as a teacher and member of the community was to Avondale. In the years that followed she was assigned to teach in St Bride's, Grand Falls, and back to be Principal in Avondale, then on to be principal in Port au Port East and finally to St John's as principal of Holy Heart where she completed her final years in the field of school education. During these years she loved all her students and always worked toward enabling them to become the best of themselves. As a principal she mentored many teachers in helping them to accompany their students in their quest for knowledge and in promoting values for a meaningful life.

In 1991 she was elected to the Congregation Leadership Team as the Assistant Congregation Leader. This was the beginning of her 24 years in designated leadership in service to the Congregation.

During these years shared her gifts as President of the Atlantic Region of Canadian Religious Conference. She was a member of the Executive Team of the North American Conference of Presentation Sisters working in collaboration with other Presentation Congregations in the USA.

She was also the President of the International Presentation Association and in this role, she made a significant contribution in helping create a global sense of mission across the Presentation World. Through her leadership the IPA became a solid foundation on which relationships among us as Presentation Sisters throughout the world grew and our efforts to promote justice together were strengthened.

In 2009 after spending a year of enjoying a well-deserved sabbatical she volunteered in Dominica, West Indies at CALL's vocational training Centre supporting at-risk youth and enabling them to have a second chance to gain an education to secure a better life.

In 2017 she returned from Dominica to St. John's and once again took up the role of Provincial Leader within the structure of the Union of Presentation Sisters.

Her advocacy and leadership that she exhibited abroad was reflective of the leader she was at home. In St. John's she served as volunteer Board Chair at the Lantern and Board Co-Chair at the Gathering Place. Recognizing the great need for counselling services in the City she provided space and ongoing support for the Ruah Program at The Lantern. In 2019 she received the Senior Citizen of the Year Award by the city of St. Johns in recognition of her advocacy and leadership.

Betty Rae was very supportive of our decision as a NL Congregation to join the Union of Presentation Sisters in 2015. After we became members, Sister Betty Rae participated in many Congregational gatherings promoting care for the earth and for those kept poor. She and her teams have been supportive of our missions in Zimbabwe and of the Garden of Oneness in Zambia as well as of the ministries at Nano Nagle Place and Lucan Mission House in Ireland.

Believing strongly in the value of collaboration, Betty Rae and her teams worked with the Sisters of Mercy following the path set by former leaders of both Congregations who opened Holy Heart High School in 1958. Sharing similar charisms both Congregations have worked together to support choirs and creative arts projects in Nfld. More recently they have played a significant role in supporting some of the most vulnerable of the City of St John's at the Gathering Place.

Outside the city of St Johns' Betty Rae was an avid supporter of our ministry among mentally challenged adults at Xavier House in Corner Brook, and in Grand Falls-Windsor she was a key person in working with a team in making the dream for Lionel Kelland Hospice become a reality.

In her most recent years, she was conscious of significant changes that were developing among us as Presentation Sisters in NL.

Our mission in Newfoundland was moving away from taking on main leadership roles to engaging in more collaborative and supportive ways of ministering. She worked diligently toward the transfer of our leadership role in our sponsored ministries to move them into the hands of competent people who held the values of our Presentation charism.

Over the past few years, the demands for health care were growing among our Sisters and that drew her to engage in greater collaboration and leadership among our staff to provide for the needs of our Sisters. During this time, she also knew care of the Sisters and future plans for the Motherhouse building required renovations. It was a major time-consuming undertaking, but she saw it to its completion only within these past few months.

Not to be forgotten as we reflect on Betty Rae's life was her love of the new Universe Story.... recognizing the oneness we share with God, one another and all creation. Her desire to live with a deepening understanding of what it means to live a Spirituality of Being in Communion was always central to her way of living and being. Her belief in the value of preserving the land and nurturing a spirituality that honours the oneness of God's creation led her to approve the opening of Virginia Water Contemplative Centre, a ministry she continued to support over the years.

Betty Rae was a visionary woman and she was able to translate that vision into actionable strategies and goals. She was able to navigate challenges and conflicts, addressing them with wisdom and compassion.

I have recalled some of the many things Betty Rae achieved in her lifetime and now I would like to share a few words about who she was as Betty Rae.

First, I would acknowledge her as a person who had great love for her family. She recognized the gift each one of her siblings was to her and made efforts to be a 'sister' who was there for them in the good and happy times and in the difficult times.

The words describing a Valiant Woman in the Book of Proverbs speak to us of who Betty Rae was...

Such a woman we are told possesses unique strength. She is one whom a person can trust, and others are strengthened by her trust in them and her ability to channel their gifts for good.

She gives unselfishly. Her tendency to always have an outstretched hand is an exemplary quality.

She possesses wisdom and integrity.

Her spirituality is reflected in her actions that give witness to the call of the Gospel to live with faith, love and hope.

She has unshakable trust in God and believes that she is in God's hands.

Holding all these qualities Betty Rae was certainly warranted to be named a Valiant Woman.

She lived a journey of service, living her life with integrity and a heart for others. As one person shared with me during these past few days.... Betty Rae did not have a lot of time for chit chat but if you needed her ear or her heart, she had hours to give you.

In a world of self-absorption, she was comfortable enough in in her own skin to make sure she was in the mix of many people to carry out her responsibilities. She also enjoyed some of the "hiddenness" of life that provided her time to watch Brad Gushue at curling events, to share a meal of with friends, or to just read a book. She particularly appreciated space to be alone and with her God.

We will remember her as a beacon of hope, a voice for justice and a living witness to God's compassion and a faithful friend. Her commitment and care will leave an indelible mark on the Congregation and the lives of many.

Grateful for the gift of Betty Rae's life among us we now surrender her back to God and to the Earth, remembering the fulness of her life with deep gratitude.

Betty Rae, we thank you for being a valiant woman and a true daughter of Nano Nagle who followed the flame of her lantern.

*In the words of Antoine Boyeau, we will all remember that a luminous light remains where a beautiful soul has passed.*