Sr. Clare Marie Figueroa

Date of Birth: February 23, 1928

Entered Eternal Life: April 29, 2020

Tribute by: Margaret Jarrett, FSA Associate

The Associates of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany are lay persons who commit to be in relationship with the Sisters in their initiatives in social action . They seek to ﬁnd ways to be instruments of peace, reconciliation and non-violence, in a broken world. We can see in Sr. Clare Marie’s life and ministry an inspiring example to emulate as we strive to live Gospel values while maintaining our chosen way of life.

We took special note of two instances of Sr. Clare Marie’s response to the call for social action during the turbulent decade from 1970 to 1980. Sr. Clare Marie assumed the role of Principal of St. Anne's Primary School, located in West Kingston, close to the epicenter of the violence that wreaked havoc and fear in the society. Someone told me that she started a Toy Library, a lending library stocked with toys and play resources that were loaned to the neighborhood children on a rotating basis. Her initiative was remarkable for bringing joy and healing to children. It was her way of being an instrument of peace in the broken West Kingston community.

It was also during her time as principal of St. Anne’s that she was one of a few who defended Fr. Richard Ho Lung in a public controversy over his creolisation of liturgical songs. Sr. Clare Marie is quoted as saying, “the hymn, ‘Enter into Jerusalem’ is a rhythmic, stirring invitation to worship and praise God, not unlike the psalm of which it is an echo. The majestic impelling invitation to ‘ Enter into Jerusalem - Let us go to God’s house ’ is reinforced by the colloquial, ‘We go celebrate, O Israel’, because this line imitates exactly the idiom of the speaker whose ecstasy is there unmistakably”.

Sr. Clare Marie’s eloquent and strenuous defense of the language and customs of the people she chose to serve is another example of her commitment to living out the mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany. In another of her roles as an educator, she taught English Language and English Literature at Immaculate Conception High School. One of her former students, our Associate Lois Kirton, wrote about her this way: “She was a mixture of seriousness and warmth. She had a certain way of enunciating her words which I can still hear. I remember how she introduced us to West Indian literature and started me on a love affair that still continues. And the ﬁrst wave of Caribbean writers whom we would later delve into at university were names she dropped on the palate with an invitation to taste: Naipaul, Lamming, Selvon, Mittelholzer.”

Sr. Clare Marie’s innovative approach to education was even more evident when somehow, she was able to have a university lecturer in her high school classroom as a “guest lecturer”, for a presentation to the students on Shakespearean theater. I am inclined to believe that this was not a common practice then or now. So much so that more than 50 years later, Lois still remembers the day that Dr. John Ingledew came to teach her at Immaculate.

Sr. Clare Marie was both a pioneer and a pilgrim. Her life teaches us how we too can live our life to the fullest, and be “Guided by the right hand of God” as she was. We too can be advocates for the rights of the disadvantaged; warriors, striking out at envy, hate and greed; healers of broken bodies, minds and souls. And always seeking for the way God’s hand is pointing us to go. In you, Sr. Clare Marie, God planted the seeds of freedom, hope and love. Today, at last, you are one with the right hand of God.

Rest in peace, Sr. Clare Marie.