



## **SR. ROSE WENTZ**

**1905-1999**

*Rose Wentz was widely known as a woman  
with a passion for the hungry, poor and homeless.*

Rose was born on January 13, 1905, to Valentine and Marian (Weissenberer) Wentz at Orin, North Dakota. The farm family consisted of 12 brothers and sisters and she grew up knowing the value of hard work and steeped in the Catholic faith. When Rose was a young woman, she and her best friend, Ida, longed to see the world outside of the small town where they lived and received permission from their parents to travel some 70 miles to Minot, North Dakota. There they went to St. Joseph's Hospital, operated by our sisters, and inquired about winter employment. They met with Mother Borgia Schneider who warmly welcomed them and hired them to work in the kitchen. This was an exciting time for Rose and her friend and the experience inspired Rose to give serious consideration to religious life. She was aware of religious sisters, since she had two cousins in the Benedictine order and had read their letters to the family. Rose had given some thought to becoming a nurse but decided that she liked cooking more and was better at it. In the spring, both girls returned to the family farms where they were needed for the work there. It was this experience with our sisters that led her to desire to enter religious life.

At the age of 21, she travelled by train to Stella Niagara, New York, and in October of 1926 she entered the Sisters of St. Francis as a postulant. She was received as a novice on September 1, 1927, and made first vows a year later. Rose was now known as Sr. Anella, receiving the new name for her new life commitment. She worked as a cook at St. Ann's in Buffalo, New York, until she took final vows on September 2, 1932. Her various assignments included: St. Vincent Orphanage in Columbus, Ohio (11 years); St. Francis Indian Mission in St. Francis, South Dakota; St. Joseph's Hospital in Alliance, Nebraska (6 years); St. Mary's in O'Neill, Nebraska (5 years); and Holy Rosary Indian Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota (13 years). At all locations she served as the excellent cook she became, feeding three meals a day, often to several hundred children and sisters.

One example of this service was feeding the hungry during her work at Holy Rosary Indian Mission, where her day began at 5:00 a.m. and never ended before 7:00 p.m. She would feed 500 boys and girls at the boarding school as well as the sisters, priests, and brothers. Just one meal required 100 pounds of meat, two and a half bushels of cabbage, 80 loaves of bread and 30 gallons of milk! She would only be away from the kitchen for mass and the divine office. Sr. Rose received help from several older children, saying the girls were more reliable than the boys, but she enjoyed them, too. She had many wonderful memories and stories of her time with the native Lakota children, who were welcome to detour through her kitchen for a cookie, a kind word, or a pat on the head. During this time, Sr. Anella returned to her baptismal name after the Vatican II Council. She was now Sr. Rose once again.

The floods of 1965 brought a tidal change to the daily operation of Marycrest Motherhouse when Sr. Muriel Witte, Provincial Minister, opened the doors to people who were homeless due to the rising waters. They were given temporary housing in a large dormitory and took their meals with the sisters. Thus, began a new era of ministry, which was in need of someone to coordinate the work on a more permanent basis. In 1971, Sr. Rose transferred to Marycrest to manage the emergency housing and start a food bank in the east wing of the convent. In addition to the several families staying in the dormitory, there were many more coming for food. This led Sr. Rose to talk to a friend, who managed the Safeway grocery store on Lowell Boulevard, for the donation of day-old bread, which was being thrown away. Soon there were donations coming in to help provide food for those suffering food deprivation. She used to say "It's a sin to throw good food away" to urge donations. Good old Catholic guilt worked every time to obtain what Sr. Rose needed. When families moved out of the emergency housing to low income housing in the projects, Sr. Rose would take extra bread to them. Soon the sight of the Marycrest pickup truck, loaded with food, became a welcome sign of hope as each family was given what they needed. Sometime later, a clothing bank was also set up near the food bank area in the convent to further aid the homeless. It was also advisable for the sisters not to leave a sweater or other articles of clothing on the back of a dining room chair, as it would disappear into the clothing bank.

Sr. Rose loved people and spent her life helping any way she could. When she needed to be strong and ask others to help her, there was no question of anyone refusing her requests for time or donations. She was like the rose flower, Sr. Rose was gentle and kind; but also like the flower, she had thorns to guilt, to remind us that she would stand up for those in need. In 1988, after 21 years as director of the emergency housing at Marycrest, she retired to Marian Residence in Alliance, Nebraska. There she continued to help the poor by making baby blankets and clothing for the Otomi children at the mission in Mexico. Community life and prayer were the joy of her final days. Sr. Rose went home to God on May 1, 1999, after a full life of faithful and loving service to God, spending it for the least of God's little ones.



## **SR. MONICA WITTE**

**1926 - 2013**

Eunice Clementine Witte was born on August 26, 1926, in Plaza, North Dakota. She was the third youngest of the eleven children of Theodore and Clementine (Woywode) Witte. She grew up on the great plains of tall grasses, fresh air and wide, open spaces, which gave her a deep love for the land and its people. There, Eunice was sheltered within the strong Catholic faith of her family. After several family moves during her early school years, Eunice graduated in 1943 from Hebron Public High School in Hebron, North Dakota. She began college at St. Catherine's in St. Paul, Minnesota, but needed to return home to help on the farm. Six of her brothers left to serve in the military during World War II and her older sisters were either married or in the convent. She taught one year in the local country school and decided that farm work was easier than teaching. Little did she know that teaching would be her life's vocation.

In the autumn of 1945, she was accepted by Mother Erica Hughes of the Sisters of Penance and Charity at Marycrest in Denver, Colorado, and entered on November 10<sup>th</sup> of that year as a postulant. She took the name Sr. Monica upon becoming a novice on August 15, 1946. Sr. Monica's formation was complete with first vows on August 16, 1947, and perpetual vows on August 17, 1950. During these years she attended Regis College and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1960 and four years later with a Master of Arts from St. Mary's College in Xavier, Kansas.

Over the years, Sr. Monica was assigned to many different houses of the province. These included St. Elizabeth's School in Denver, Colorado; St. Francis Mission in St. Francis, South Dakota; and Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. She also taught at two schools in Nebraska: St. Agnes School in Scottsbluff and St. Agnes Academy, in Alliance, Nebraska. Sr. Monica enjoyed serving one year at the Generalate in Rome, Italy, and called it a cultural treat. She served also as local minister throughout her assignments to various places, including Marycrest in Denver, Colorado. However, of all these places, Sr. Monica's heart was captured by the Lakota people on the two reservations of South Dakota. She felt utterly at home and was with where her vocation to "love God and serve people" was lived out with Franciscan simplicity, joy, and hospitality. Sr. Monica thrived there for 39 of her 59 years of ministry and served faithfully the children she so ardently loved and respected.

Sr. Monica was well-loved as a teacher of 'English as a Second Language' to the Lakota children, primarily in the Red Cloud High School. The children knew they were loved and cared for and returned respect and love to her. The poor people of the reservation were of special concern to Sr. Monica. Many elderly women would come with grandchildren in tow,

needing food or clothing. These were the ones who most suffered from the prevalence and abuse of alcohol and drugs. Sr. Monica knew the government checks never lasted until the end of the month and her heart responded to their needs. When they needed food, she often would give canned nonperishable food and when they needed warm clothes, she would raid the common closet. More than one sister in the community unknowingly contributed to Sr. Monica's generous care for the poorest people. Items not often needed, mysteriously disappeared and were not usually missed until later. Sr. Monica asked one of the sisters if she could borrow her robe when she went for a visit. Later, we all laughed when sister realized it was never returned. We had so much compared to many at the mission, it was never too hard to let go of things with Sr. Monica's help. The creative beadwork these women elders made was often exchanged for items of food and clothing. Then Sr. Monica would bring these beautiful pieces to our community meetings, which the sisters were happy to buy, thus contributing back to the people of the mission.

Being a prairie woman, Sr. Monica was an excellent cook. Although we ate at the cafeteria during the week, on the weekends we took turns cooking in the convent and Sr. Monica often prepared tasty breads and soups, even homemade noodles. Her specialty was fudge, with and without nuts. It was such a treat to come home from school and find a batch of fresh fudge sitting on the table. Yes, dear Sr. Monica will always be remembered as a gentle, humble woman of God, modeling for us the true spirit of St. Francis and Mother Magdalen.

Sr. Monica retired from teaching at Red Cloud Indian School, Holy Rosary Mission, in 2006 and moved to Marian Residence in Alliance, Nebraska. There were some health concerns and her eyesight continued to fail. This loss was a special suffering as Sr. Monica was an avid reader. A special lighted reader and audio books gave comfort and enjoyment. She continued to receive visits from her good friends on the Pine Ridge Reservation and continued to give some financial assistance through the sale of their beadwork. In the early weeks of June 2013, Monica began experiencing discomfort, thought to be minor complications of ongoing health problems. After a fall in the early morning hours of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the staff returned to check on her and found she had quietly slipped away into the arms of her loving God, just as she wished to do, and as she had lived her life - humble and faithful to the end. After a funeral at Marian Residence with the sisters and community there, her body was taken to Holy Rosary Mission at Pine Ridge. There at the mass and burial, she was memorialized and honored by the Lakota people who loved her so dearly. Monica was truly home with her God and her people.

*She walked among a people not her own by accident of birth,  
But by a conscious choice of the heart,  
And they took her into their hearts, as one of their own.*

**In conclusion**, the following poem, by Edwina Gateley, is offered to honor both Sr. Rose Wentz and Sr. Monica Witte, and all among us, who work to bring the charism of Francis, Clare, and Magdalen to a desperately needy world. Both women re-founded the charism of Mother Magdalen Damen in providing selfless service to the poor among them. The poem speaks to us too, inviting and challenging us to follow in their footsteps, knowing prophets are never comfortable to live with.

**Brave, reckless souls, these founders,  
Who dare birth dreams and run with them down our city streets,  
Driven by a passion that leaves us gasping  
In wonderment ... and disapproval.  
Brave, reckless souls, these founders,  
Who would change the world with their visions of God  
And have us (pouting saints and reluctant angels) do the same.  
Brave, reckless souls, these founders, whose lights we flee,  
Refusing to dance to an unknown tune lest it whirl us, dizzying, into God.  
Brave, reckless souls, these founders, who in league with Wisdom  
(God's wild, free Spirit) forever run among us,  
Singing aloud their songs of love  
And trailing clouds of glory!**

*Edwina Gateley, Christ in the Margins  
(Saying "yes" to the Spirit to en flesh new and daring dreams.)*