



Eulogy of Sister Rita Basta, BVM (James Celeste)

Liturgy, Holy Redeemer Church

April 28, 2018

Good morning and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Rita Basta.

Rita Marie was welcomed into the Basta family on March 2, 1942. Her parents, James and Celeste (Renz) Basta lived in St. Paul, Minn., with their first son, James. Two additional brothers, Joe and John, completed the family. Rita's father was Bohemian American and her mother German American.

James was a salesman. Mom was a great baker who made delicious cookies every Christmas for all of Mr. Basta's clients. Mom also expected Rita to help decorate and package the many boxes of cookies that were needed. Celeste was a proud graduate of St. Catherine College in St. Paul. Rita and her brothers grew up with jovial camaraderie but each developed a unique individuality and personality.

As youngsters, Jim and Rita received piano lessons. Celeste trained them to practice one hour each morning when they got up. Rita liked to recall those early morning practices, saying that they were a lifelong habit to maintain her love of music.

Rita attended the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish ES before meeting the BVMs at Our Lady of Peace HS. She was active in the Shubert (piano), Math, and Camera Clubs and Sodality. As an 18-year-old, she wrote to the BVM community indicating that she felt called by God to be a nun as well as a teacher. She entered four months later on July 31, 1960.

After two and a half years in the novitiate, Rita made her first vows on Feb. 2, 1962, and final vows on Aug. 15, 1968. In the meantime, Rita went on to complete her bachelor's degree in mathematics and a master's degree from Notre Dame, plus two additional minors and her teaching credentials.

Rita's ministry focused on secondary teaching, college course work, and spiritual direction. Her first mission, as well as her last, were all in southern California. She educated students and teachers at Bellarmine-Jefferson HS (Burbank), Alemany HS (Mission Hills), California State University—Northridge (CSUN), and Mission College (Mission Hills).

Rita also began serving in campus ministry while at Alemany, which developed into spiritual ministry to adults while a professor at CSUN. She continued to serve in congregational service through multiple (eight) committee assignments from 1969 to the present.

Rita personally engaged herself and intellectually stimulated those preparing for teaching. She related, "I love to teach, I love people, and I love mathematics." However, she did feel intimidated when she began at CSUN, as there were only 10 women out of the 50 math professors. She was the only "religious sister" in a faculty of 800.

Rita would use any song, pedagogy, technology, life experience, and the art of improvisation to connect students with a realistic understanding of mathematical concepts. Teaching a diverse population at CSUN meant that she had to engage the whole person to eliminate cultural misunderstandings or leanings.

Wearing a variety of actual hats each day, Rita began with a commonality that leveled the playing field, putting students at ease, and then taught her tessellations, frieze patterns, and Fibonacci numbers. She took pride in the university's preparation of 1,200 teachers.

Beyond her accomplishments in the classroom as teacher, professor, and listener, Rita synthesized a unique understanding of spirituality as it relates to math and science. Listen to her words of 25 years ago from a 1992 article in our BVM magazine, *Salt*. Rita lived these words.

Reflecting on the Psalm 19: "The heavens proclaim your glory, O God, and the firmament shows forth the work of your hands," Rita says:

"When I reflect on this phrase as a mathematician, my mind and thoughts slip into wonder and awe. Math and science and spirituality—is there a connection? In this era of individualism, high technology, dysfunctionality, and seeming Godlessness, we need to look at the harmony, order, depth, and beauty in our world, in the creativity of our minds. So many images come to mind: beehives shaped like hexagons, resonance behind the color of autumn leaves, shapes of soap bubbles governed by surface tension, the self-similarity of each floret and each piece of a floret to the entire head of broccoli. We need to allow the art of improvisation within ourselves: to combine the familiar with the not so familiar, to uncover our aesthetic sense, to allow the landscape of our lives be in flux, to let God 'get hold of us' and mirror a depth we are not used to taking time for. This world in which we live IS immersed in God, if only we look!"

In prayer, in meeting of people, in teaching, Rita lived these words.

Rita lived for 22 years at the local convent at St. Robert, Burbank, and Our Lady of Lourdes, Tujunga, Calif., before sharing a home with Carol Baetz, RSM and Janice Link, BVM for the last 30 years. Together, they shared their families, vacations to appreciate God's creation, music, prayer, and their local La Crescenta community.

She so loved life, that even when faced with terminal cancer, she embraced it with an outstanding candor. She learned to analyze the data, requesting a copy before her meeting with the doctor, and then moved forward with only positive thoughts. She practiced discipline and resiliency in the manner that she previously used for students. She wanted to be a role model for others. And this loving community enabled her to do just that. Sisters Carol and Jan cared for her at home, friends from CSUN and the larger La Crescenta/Los Angeles community, and BVMs provided countless rides, meals, and companionship at appointments to support Rita in her tenacity for this beautiful life. Thank you to each and all of you!

On her last day, she was calling out, "New life!" "New life!" "Hello everybody!" What patterns and insights did she see?

Receive her soul, O most holy ones; present her now to God, most high.