

Sister Rita White SSND - 80 Year Jubilee!



Sister Rita White, Pastoral Work with AIDS patients, Lima, Peru

*"What if God
wanted me?"*

I was born on Sept. 2, 1922, the first of two children to Murray White and Julie Bush in the small mountain village of Revelstoke, British Columbia. When I was 4 years old I noticed that my Dad was not very strong but he could still put me to sleep with his fiddle and Mom with the organ. In February, 1926 I was shown my new baby brother, Jack, and then just 2 years later, on September 10, 1928, Daddy died of cancer.

I completed my elementary education in Revelstoke and then went by train to Leipzig, Saskatchewan to enrol in the Notre Dame boarding school for Grade 9. With several girls, some of whom were going to Waterdown to become Sisters, I enjoyed the boarding school life. But on Feb. 11, 1937 I became frightened by the thought: "What if God wanted me?" I concluded that God would get what He wanted anyway, so I knew that I had better pray hard. I entered the candidature in Waterdown, Ontario and continued in the novitiate making my first vows in 1941 and final vows in 1947.

After Teachers' College, I taught elementary school for 21 years in various schools in Ontario and in British Columbia. One day I was visited by the Provincial and she asked me to go to Bolivia. I was honoured to be asked and what a grace it was for me to be with the poor. I asked myself. "If we are all equal in God's eyes, why this destitution?" I did not want the privileges, which the habit gave to me,

when I was travelling on the same bus with mothers with babies. So I was ready for changes!

After 4 years involved in the educational ministry in Bolivia, I engaged in studies at St. Paul University in Ottawa. Then there was the call to return to Latin America. In 1982 I was asked to join S. Marty in opening a formation house in Villa El Salvador, Lima, Perú. At this same time, I responded readily to the needs of persons with HIV/AIDs. For the next 9 years I visited many AIDS patients in every hospital in Lima - visited their homes, began self-help groups with them and advocated for them. I had always wanted to be in healthcare or social work, and here I found out I was a natural in this ministry. My most fulfilling ministry was with the patients in Lima and I miss it now. I keep up a correspondence with several who are still living. They taught me much!

I retired from my ministry to AIDS patients and their families in Perú in 2002 and returned to Canada. Many AIDS patients and friends assured me that they would carry on this ministry.

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A woman with HIV/AIDS whom Rita accompanied over 6 years wrote to the Provincial at the time of Rita returning to Canada. "While Sister Rita was here in Perú, the work and support she offered was most unforgettable in her presence to persons diagnosed with AIDS. She gave nourishment and strength to us so that we could carry on despite our diagnosis. We are very grateful to her for her courage and the impetus she had in accompanying us, visiting our homes and in the hospitals when we were ill."

While being involved in some pastoral work in a local parish in Burlington, Ontario, I joined a senior's group who "knitted squares" to make lap throes that are given to cancer patients. The "Square Ladies" is a wonderful group. All are concerned and show loving kindness to new cancer patients who will receive the hand-crafted afghans.

Now I am retired and accepting what comes my way. My first challenge is to accept what I can and what I cannot do. The second is to accept my diminishment along with a growing comfort in just being me for whatever God wants.