

Sister Clare Mary Roden, SC

When you look back on your school days, you may not have clear memories of every teacher along the way. However, you are sure to remember the teacher who really cared about you and inspired you to do your very best. For countless former students, Sister Clare Mary Roden was that special teacher.

Sister Clare's story begins in Jersey City, where she and her three brothers grew up in a nurturing Catholic family. Her parents modeled a life of faith, teaching prayers to the children and never missing Mass. Sister Clare loved learning and the Dominican sisters who taught at her elementary school. She still credits her eighth grade teacher with giving her the skills needed to write cohesive and coherent 15-minute compositions. "She gave me the background to think on my feet, so to speak, which I needed for the six hours of writing to pass my Comps for a Masters in English from Notre Dame."

Sister Clare earned a full scholarship to attend the Academy of Saint Aloysius. "I got to know the sisters and I loved the Sisters of Charity right away." Though she also loved dances, pretty clothes and good times with her teenaged friends, she became increasingly aware of a desire to join the Sisters of Charity. "I was 17 and my parents weren't too happy. But they let me come and thank God, I've never regretted it."

The early years in the community were both challenging and exhilarating for Sister Clare. She remembers her excitement when, as a postulant, she was able to witness the first time that Sisters of Charity made perpetual vows. "Before that, we were a diocesan community and had taken vows by the year. Now we would become a papal community. Though I was only 17, I was smart enough to know this was an historic event and I really wanted to see it." By offering to help with the elderly sisters, she got permission to go to Saint Anne Villa where the sisters made their perpetual vows with Bishop Boland. This was the first of two very historic moments she was to witness as a Sister of Charity; years later Sister Clare was in attendance at the canonization of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton when Sister Hildegarde became the first woman to read at a Papal Mass.

As a young sister, Sister Clare was eager to begin her ministry in education. Her first assignments were teaching 6th grade at Saint Antoninus in Newark and then at Saint Joseph's in Paterson. This was followed by a year of teaching 8th grade at Saint Bridget's in Jersey City. Because the other 8th grade teacher was ill for much of the year, Sister Clare often found herself in charge of 85 8th graders. She recalls, "They were tough kids!"

Sister Clare's experience with her challenging 8th graders made her so adept at maintaining control that she initially intimidated the Sacred Heart Academy high school girls whom she taught the following year. Sister Clare laughs, "I was there about a month when another sister came to me and said, 'Clare, could you lighten up a bit? The kids are terrified of you!'"

Sister Clare did lighten up a bit. She absolutely loved teaching high school English, as well as Latin, Religion and other subjects. Her teaching journey continued from Sacred Heart Academy in Hoboken to St. John Cathedral High School in Paterson. She then served for seven years as the Supervisor of Schools for the Western Province before returning to the classroom at Paramus Catholic High School.

No matter where she taught, Sister Clare invested her whole self in her teaching and in her students. Teaching brought her great joy and the students thrived with her dedication, enthusiasm and caring. She set high standards and gave her students the tools and the confidence they needed to succeed. The impact she made and the fondness with which her students regarded her are clearly evidenced by how many former students maintain relationships with her even today through frequent calls, cards, and visits. And so many years later, Sister Clare



still remembers her students by name, a fact that may have startled more than one former student who encountered Sister Clare long after sitting in her class.

Following many years working with high school students, Sister Clare brought the same enthusiasm and devotion when she went on to lead the religious education program at Annunciation Church in Paramus and then at St. James in Totowa. She later supervised the religion program at Holy Trinity School in Hackensack. She thoroughly enjoyed working with people of all ages, from instructing little kindergartners to teaching the teachers what they needed to know to become certified in religious education.

When the convent at Holy Trinity closed in 2015, Sister Clare moved to an apartment in what was then Saint Anne Villa and is now The Villa at Florham Park. She remains very active and involved with community life, though some activities have been necessarily curtailed due to the pandemic. Before the pandemic, she attended daily Mass at the Villa's Chapel and is now grateful to watch daily Mass on television.

Always ready to learn new things, Sister Clare uses her laptop computer to keep up with communications by email, pray along with the daily devotions posted by the University of Notre Dame, and occasionally look up bits of poetry and varied information. She is an avid reader. She says that she always seems to be crocheting a baby blanket. These blankets were especially appreciated by her nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews who received blankets to celebrate the birth of each new member of Sister Clare's wonderful extended family. Most recently, a Villa staff member and his wife were overjoyed to receive a green and white baby blanket that so beautifully coordinates with the room that they have prepared for their new arrival.

Sister Clare begins each day with a prayer of gratitude to thank God for his goodness. She prays, "Thank you, God, for another day and for all the wonderful people who have been in my life and who are in my life." After 71 years as a Sister of Charity, she exclaims, "It's been a great life!" Placing her future in God's hands, she continues to embrace each new day as a precious gift and a wondrous new opportunity to discover what God has in store for her.