

Sister Eleanor O'Brien
Sister Mary Rita

Born	Regina, SK Canada	March 16, 1924
Postulant	Sacred Heart College, Regina,	September 8, 1942
Novice	Sacred Heart College, Regina	July 25, 1943
Profession	Sacred Heart College, Regina	July 26, 1945
Perpetual Vows	Sacred Heart College, Regina	July 26, 1951
Died	Santa Maria Home, Regina	February 11, 2015



Sister Eleanor was the eldest of six children, three girls and three boys, born to John and Marcella (Galvin) O'Brien in Regina, Canada. Both Marcella and John were born in Carleton Place, Ontario of staunch Catholics of Irish origin. Their eldest son, John, died in infancy and the others were educated in the Catholic Schools in Regina. The O'Brien and Galvin families were rich in vocations to the religious life and priesthood, Bishop John Sherlock of London, Ontario being among them.

Eleanor and her dear friend Marion McGuigan (Sr. M Bertrand) together entered the novitiate in 1942, just two months after their graduation from Sacred Heart Academy. With the religious habit in 1943 Eleanor received the name Mary Rita, and, after completion of her novitiate in 1945, pursued university studies in Regina and "teacher training" in Moose Jaw, SK.

Subsequently Sister taught school at both elementary and high school level in Regina, Lebret and Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, at the same time earning Bachelor and Masters Degrees in Education. One indication of her talent as an educator was that she was chosen to be one of the first in a team-teaching program in the Regina Catholic Schools. After twenty-five years in the classroom Eleanor entered into a series of "second careers" within the congregation, working as librarian, archivist, local superior and provincial secretary. During and after this time she also served as spiritual director, hospital chaplain and, what was perhaps her most moving and meaningful work, ministry to prisoners, first going to Stony Mountain prison near Winnipeg and eventually in Regina as a member of "Friends on the Outside", a group dedicated to helping prisoners and to their families.

Eleanor had great compassion for the suffering that accompanied confinement. Between her experience of prison ministry in Winnipeg and later in Regina she spent some years in Lebret convent caring for our elderly Sisters. When volunteering for this work she remarked, "I realized there are forms of imprisonment besides being behind bars "

Later, in Regina, she became a hospital volunteer and also offered spiritual care for our Sisters who were patients at Santa Maria Nursing Home. One of Eleanor's sources of "entertainment" was membership in a "Knit and Chat" group who met weekly to knit garments and accessories of every kind for needy adults and children. This was also, of course, an opportunity to "catch up on the news!" – always important to Eleanor!

Eleanor was devoted to her family and eager to spend time with them for every major event. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were especially important and much consideration went into the choice of gifts for the little ones and means of showing appreciation to the elders. During her last illness her nieces were tireless in visiting Sister as well as their mother, her sister, who is also in fragile health. Their appreciation of Eleanor was shown by presence at all major events, especially Jubilees and significant Birthdays.

Amid all these activities Eleanor's profound concern was always for her own spiritual growth. Recently people have spoken of her profound faith. The priest who gave the homily at her funeral described the four stages of spiritual growth through which Eleanor passed during the years he knew her and yet in each stage of which some part of her always remained. The niece who gave her eulogy talked of Eleanor's love and regard for others. Sisters speaking of Eleanor use words like "respect for the opinions of others – regard for their "space". She was "up-lifting, always willing to help, not moody but kind, even when upset".

When Sister Eleanor celebrated her 90th birthday last year she was already preparing to go into nursing care at Santa Maria. She spent almost a year "upstairs", winning the nursing staff by her good nature and the fact that, to quote one nurse, "She is the only one who has ever bothered to learn all our names." This mark of respect and gratitude was typical of Eleanor's gratitude and profound care for others.

Sister's funeral was con-celebrated at Santa Maria Home on February 17 by Fathers Glen Zimmer omi and Kenneth Koep with over one hundred friends and relations present. Her remains were laid to rest in the grave of her dear friend and cousin, Sister Geraldine Boyle (M. St. Thomas), sharing a plot with thirty-six other of our Sisters. They rest in peace.