



Sister Rosemarie Montoya, CSJ
May 10, 1956 - April 28, 2022

Born in Los Angeles, Rosemarie's ancestors came to California from Mexico several generations ago. Her loving parents, Salvador who was born in Pasadena, and Maria Louisa Mesa, born in El Paso, raised a close-knit family of eight children. Rosie was the second oldest child. The eight children were, Lillian, Rosemarie, Carlos, Susan, Mark, Thomas, Bernice and Greg. The family always regarded their mother as the "heart" of the family, their father died at an early age.

Sister Maria Angela Mesa CSJ, and her brother, Father Manny Mesa, were very close cousins to Rosemarie. They were supportive of Rosie as she began a discernment process to enter religious life. Both Angela and Manny died young, and Rosie often mentioned how much she missed them.

Her family describe Rosie as solid and steady, an industrious student. Rosemarie attended Niemes Grammar School in Artesia, and Richard Gahr High School, in Cerritos, graduating in 1974. For two years, she attended Cerritos College in Norwalk, and graduated from Loyola Marymount in 1978 with a Bachelor of Arts in History.

Entering the Sisters of St. Joseph in September 1978, Rosie met the other young women in her formation program. Rosemarie was received into the community as a novice on August

14, 1979. She pronounced her first vows on June 23, 1981, and final vows on July 25, 1987. In 2005, she joyfully celebrated 25 years as a Sister of St. Joseph.

Sister Rosemarie went on to obtain a Secondary Teaching Credential in 1986, and began working toward an MA in Spirituality, attending the University of San Diego, Loyola Marymount and Mount St. Mary's College.

Her mission experience began as a teacher at Our Lady of Angels School in San Diego, and included Kennewick, WA, St. Anselm in Los Angeles, Precious Blood in Banning, CA. In 1991, she volunteered and was missioned to Hawaii, where she remained for 24 years at St. Anthony School. At St. Anthony School, Sister Rosie taught all middle grade subjects except science. Every May she looked forward to constructing a May pole for the school to honor Mary.

She loved her students and they loved her in return. Sister had a special concern for the many military families who comprised about 40% of the student body. Some of her after-school time was spent supporting the spouses of the Marines who were overseas. She would listen, console, advise and offer whatever help she could to comfort them in their concerns for themselves and their family.

Rosie was considered a generous community member. It was said that she really loved and valued everything Hawaiian. She decorated St. Joseph by the Sea Convent with tasteful art and sea related arrangements. Daily she walked to the Kailua beach, praying as she relished the white sands and turquoise waters. She even requested a Hawaiian 'kumu hala' (teacher of hula) if she could join her halau (school) in order to learn the art of hula dancing. She was accepted and over the years in Hawaii performed with her halau sisters in programs at the church, school, and in CSJ and public community celebrations.

A faithful lector and communion minister, she was frequently seen at the parish church. Often she took her straw bag and shopped at the open market for fresh vegetables and fruit.

Using her mother's recipes, Rosie would lovingly prepare Mexican dishes for family, community and at times, she invited local priests to dinner. She was very thoughtful of the elderly Maryknoll sisters that lived in Kailua and often gave them rides to various functions. Following the example of her father, she enjoyed watering the backyard plants. When family members visited Hawaii, she proudly served as an excellent local tour guide. It was evident to them she greatly loved Hawaii. Her family commented she looked more Hawaiian than Mexican, with her deep tan.

Pleasant by nature, she could also hold her ground, but was willing to listen to other points of view. Sister Rosemarie could be described as earthy with her love of nature,

especially of the ocean. For most of her life, she enjoyed good health, having a strong constitution.

Her straightforward manner and strength of character helped her to accomplish whatever she set out to do, and to do it to the very best of her ability. Loyalty and devotion to family were always important to her. One example of her loyalty and devotion occurred in 2011 when her mother was given a dire diagnosis of liver cancer. Rosie immediately flew from Hawaii to take part in caregiving along with her family. Rosie was the primary caregiver 24 – 7 until her mother’s death.

In 2015, Rosie was missioned to Carondelet Center in Los Angeles. She found adjusting to Los Angeles and Carondelet Center difficult, leaving behind many long-time friends and close relationships in community after 24 special years in Hawaii. Being in LA did allow her closer proximity to her brothers and sisters and their families. At Carondelet Center, she was generous with her gifts, helping with reading in the chapel, often the “youngest” for the readings at the Seder Service and visiting the sisters in Holy Family. She enjoyed a good party and could be tempted to a little hula at a Hawaiian dinner. In 2021, Rosie moved to St. John of God to join the others sisters who needed specialized care. There she enjoyed her mementos of Hawaii wrapped around her, frequent visits from her family and the love and care of the staff at St. John of God. She died peacefully the morning of April 28, 2022.

And now, dear Rosie, may you find delight and endless joy in the boundless ocean of God’s love.

~ Sister Frances Baker, CSJ with input from the family and Sister Claudia Wong, CSJ