

Rita was born in Saint Ferdinand, Quebec. Her father, Gédéon, was a farmer. Her mother, Juliette Côté, was a housewife surrounded by her eleven children. Rita was the third. In this family God was always first. *As soon as we learnt to talk*, Rita said, *Mother would have us recite the name of Jesus. Every evening, we recited the rosary followed by the litanies.* At seven, she made her first communion. At eleven, she was confirmed by her maternal uncle, Conrad. He had been ordained to the priesthood by Cardinal Villeneuve

From six to twelve years old, she went to the local one-room schoolhouse. As her mother fell ill, she stopped her studies to run the household. She carried out her tasks with great maturity and became the cherished sister to her siblings. She was happy in her chores. She enjoyed a delightful youth through her hobbies of dancing and music.

Rita was very involved in the activities of her parish. She sang in the choir. At twenty, she felt called to religious life, but she did not know where to go. As some of her friends entered the novitiate of the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, she also sent her request to enter. She was denied. Disappointed, she continued to pray to know God's will in her life. Everyday, she prayed a prayer printed on a holy card left by traveling FMM in her hometown. It was a holy card of Maria Assunta! *All of a sudden,*

I saw like a miracle, she said, that this sister was dressed in white and that she was both devoted to Adoration and missions. At the bottom of the holy card, there was an address. I no longer had any doubts! And I wrote immediately to be admitted. The answer came quickly. Mother Élise de St Charles welcomed me to the novitiate of Grande-Allée on September 15 1948. It was a day of joy. I started my formation supported by my family and my two uncles, Pères des Missions Étrangères.

Sister Rita in her generosity and devotion desired only one thing: to give herself totally to Jesus so others would know and love him. Right after her temporary profession in 1951, she was sent to Ottawa and then to Rigaud where she helped in the kitchen. For ten years from 1953, it is in Montreal that she shared her culinary skills. Times were hard and food was expensive. She must constantly be creative to prepare the daily meals for twenty ladies on retreat, a hundred daycare children, eighty boarders, and sixty sisters. Tried and tested cook, she heroically met these challenges with the help of another sister. It was quite a feat.

In 1963, she received the surprise of her life when she was summoned to a distant mission. She first stopped in Rome and then continued to the Middle-East. She first worked in an orphanage in Beirut,

Lebanon. She studied Arabic and catechism. She was then sent to Egypt. In Alexandria and Cairo, She worked in a kindergarten. *...But it's in Armant Upper Egypt, a village of 14,000 people that I got to know*, she said, *the joys of true poverty with no electricity, lack of water, and such an adaptation to the culture.* Sister Rita traveled with a donkey in the cool mornings across sugar cane and cotton fields to be with the poor. She endeavoured to empowering women through literacy programs, sewing courses, support, and love. During seven years, she performed countless practical discreet services. She had a sharp sense for work well done and the concern of always being an evangelical presence among these people.

In 1974, she is asked to return to Canada. After a time of rest and renewal, she went to a fraternity in the North End of Montreal. There her many talents are put to good use. She participates in the animations for the activities of the Résidence du Confort. She works as an orderly in the intercommunity infirmary in Laval. Elle s'engagea comme préposée à l'Infirmierie intercommunautaire de Laval. for fourteen years, she renders an outstanding service with her joyfulness and kindness to all these sick religious brothers and sisters as they struggle with disabilities.

In 1996, she takes up a request from the Maison du Père where an unconditional welcome of Montreal's homeless is at the

heart of their mission. She will volunteer there for ten years. Through her sewing, she will mend their clothes and transform donated clothes. She also helps in the service of meals with motherly compassion.

Once back, in our Laurier community, she slows down in her activities. She retains her joy of living while rendering several services for her sisters such as sewing and haircuts. She loves nature and goes to the Botanical Garden to enjoy its marvels. She spends hours on the terrace admiring the sunsets. She enjoys visiting her sisters in the infirmary to bring them comfort and support. She also deepens her ties with her family.

Silently, she goes over the different stages of her life. She writes, *Everywhere, I have been happy. The Lord has granted me my wish of being a missionary who gives her life for the poorest. In all of my missions, I have always been a sacristan. It is there, close to Him that I hear every morning: Go, I'm sending you to spread the Good News.*

The, she started to have trouble breathing. She was admitted in our infirmary. Aware of her failing health, she started preparing for the coming of the Lord. In her room, she contemplated the Blessed Host in our chapel through the close circuit television. She stated to one of her companions, *I believe the hour of departure will soon toll. I look at him and speak to him just as I do with you.*

I have so many things to tell him. He can come. I'm ready.

In June 2021 with the other sisters of the infirmary, she moved to Carrefour Providence. She was happy. She spent many happy hours with her family during their visits. She went to daily mass and received Jesus with such devotion right up to the end. Then, all of a sudden one night as she had so desired, the Lord came to get her to celebrate Christmas in heaven. Rita, beloved sister, go in the peace of the Lord!



***Sister Rita Provencher
(Marie Denise-Emma)***

Franciscan Missionary of Mary

***Born in Saint-Ferdinand, QC
on June 10 1928.***

***Entered the Institute
in Quebec City, QC
on September 15 1948.***

***Died in Montreal, QC
on December 23 2022***

***in her 95th year,
the 74th of her religious life.***

May she rest in the peace of Christ!



Holy card received October 30 1965
that she kept in her prayer book.