

## Sr. Rita T. Finnen, DW

### This Is The Day

By Sr. Rosemarie Greco, DW

This is the day. When Rita asked me to give her eulogy over a year ago, it seemed like such a day would be so far off but here it is. This is the day.

It's a day preceded by months of reflection on Rita's life and on the values and inspiration of scripture and song that gave her strength, support and vision.

Rita chose a song for her service which says:

Long before my journey starts,  
When in my youth I searched my heart;  
I would pray for her, wait for her;  
Wisdom my road, my goal, my star.

(“Wisdom, My Road” from *Of Holy Women*, Leslie Palmer)

This journey with Wisdom started early in Rita's life amid her parents, Alice and Malachi, her brothers Malachy and Joseph and sisters Mary and Alice. The journey began in her family for Wisdom God lived among them. The journey continued through her youth and her student years at St. Brendan's Diocesan high school in Brooklyn, NY. Through these years, Rita knew she wanted to be a nun but she didn't feel attracted to any of the several congregations she had known. At the same time, her father did not want any of his daughters leaving home until they had the means to earn their own livings. Rita told me that he knew how difficult it



would be for a woman to manage on her own if she did not have the necessary education to earn her own living. Words of wisdom permeated the Finnen family!

With that being said, Rita decided to go to Gibbs Secretarial School because the course of studies was less than a year. She was a “Gibbs Girl,” as the title went at that time and it was the standard for outstanding women professionals and eventually the school was known for training women executives. Wisdom was present in this decision and in this part of her journey. Rita said, “I did that training and was working at Seaman’s Bank on Wall Street when I became involved in the Legion of Mary.” (Coincidentally, years later, I was working on Wall Street a block away from Seaman’s Bank and was also involved with the Legion of Mary.) Through the Legion, Rita volunteered at St. Charles Hospital on Hicks Street, Brooklyn after work days at the Bank. She said, “That’s how I became involved with Montfort’s spirituality and met the Daughters of Wisdom. I knew then, that was where I belonged” ... and she has been with us ever since.

Rita was born on January 6, 1931. This is the day when the Christian world celebrates the Epiphany; the day when God was made known to the nations through the birth of Jesus Christ, Incarnate Wisdom and through the journey of the Magi who followed a star. There seems to me to be so many insights and meanings in this date, this event and the cosmic significance surrounding Rita’s birth.

What do I see in this? I look to the stars. Rita was born under the sign of Capricorn. The qualities and characteristics of those born under this sign are patience, earth-wisdom, dignity and deliberation. Capricorn people are said to be

“no-nonsense people.” It is a sign that helps you stand on solid ground, a ground that is rooted in a tradition.

Then, there’s the formation of the Capricorn constellation – it forms in the sky a triangle. Rita chose the Celtic triangle, the Trinity knot for her liturgy cover. This trinity symbol expresses union with God in a relationship that cannot be broken. Rita lived this throughout her life.

In the congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom, Rita was known as Sister Joseph of the Trinity... Joseph, the patron of a happy death; the trinity, union with God.

And finally, Capricorn women exhibit the qualities of responsibility, discipline and good management.

I think we have seen all these in Rita. Her ministerial service shows that our congregational leaders saw them in her as they assigned and affirmed her as Head Nurse at Maryview Hospital, VA, shortly after her religious profession, then as Director of Nursing at Holy Family and Good Samaritan Hospitals in NY, Community Coordinator at St. Charles Hospital, Director of Nursing in West Virginia, Associate Professor of Nursing at Bluefield State College and East Carolina University, Nursing Specialist at Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

Volunteer service was another significant part of Rita’s life. For 32 years she was co-facilitator of a Cancer Support Group. She also was a Literacy Volunteer of America, providing radio reading services in East Carolina for blind and disabled persons and a volunteer with the organization "A Time for Science," a learning center to advance science literacy.

In her parish of St. Gabriel, she trained and scheduled parish ministers. In her congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom she freely offered her gifts. The congregation recognized her gift of clear thinking especially during her years as Province Councilor and other services that needed her unique skills.

Rita was my first “superior” after my formation years. This was at St. Charles Hospital community – a community of 40 sisters. Rita’s care and good judgment was experienced by all of us and especially by the senior sisters Solange, Marie and Celeste. As I look back on those days, with the experience I now have, I can’t imagine how she did it!

Rita was generous with her service and commitment to others. She was consistent, focused, a leader, an educator for health care and, in all her life, rooted in the Wisdom spirituality tradition.

With all these wonderful experiences, ministries and self-gifts to others, we see Rita’s life as fashioned by Wisdom and offering God’s gifts through her life, to others. The spiritual life, however, is primarily a journey of letting go of all of these; it is a journey toward empty-handedness. Rita chose a reading from the Book of Wisdom for her wake service. It reads in part, “Death finds you without accumulation; your hands are unclenched and empty. There is nothing left over; you leave without residue. Wisdom is the way you move from birth to death with grace and freedom.” (Wisdom 7, 6-12 translated by Rabbi Rami Shapiro in *The Divine Feminine in Biblical Literature*). In this, Rita experienced tremendous grace, gratitude and freedom.

A friend, sister and companion over many years, Sister Edna English shared a major part of Rita’s journey. The friendship of Edna and Rita expressed itself in

their ministry in North Carolina. Theirs was a visible witness to the values of community and apostolic life of the Daughters of Wisdom. They were truly sisters among the people in their Greenville, North Carolina community. The people, too, were sisters and brothers to them sharing their gifts of care and friendship. They supported Edna and Rita during times of joy and sorrow and are truly People of Wisdom.

All her life, wherever she was in ministry, Rita was an integral member of the Daughters of Wisdom. The community of her sisters gave her support throughout her ministries and offered compassionate care and understanding during her days of illness. Rita was grateful for this.

Rita's sister Alice and her husband Hugh kept in close contact with Rita, giving support, care and love to her all the days of her journey. Alice and Hugh personally are no strangers to suffering. Their daughter Annie was one of the teachers who died in the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Now Annie and her aunt Rita and so many of their family are together in a special way in the heart of God.

In January of this year, Rita told me she had a dream in which she was looking for her friend, Daughter of Wisdom Marilyn Lieber and she couldn't find her. I was moved by that, anticipating that the bonds of that friendship remained so strong and the two were both, in different ways, living in the world of Wisdom. Now, they have found each other again. We, too, will find Rita again and in a new way. Rita will be known in a new way as we experience her presence and the impact that her life had on ours. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, St. John Chrysostom wrote: "Those whom we love and lose are now, no longer where they were, but they are

where we are.” So, today we understand that even when a star dies, it is no longer where it once was. Its essence continues to influence the greater cosmos, all of creation and all of us.

The prayers and readings in the services Rita prepared for her funeral reveal her devotions to Wisdom, to Mary the Mother of God, to Jesus and the Cross. Rita knew so well what our co-founder St. Louis de Montfort meant when he said, “Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom.” When we sang in this liturgy, on the feast of the birth of Mary, “Hail Mary, full of grace, teach us Wisdom, teach us love,” these are not just pretty words. They are the core of Wisdom spirituality which Rita so tangibly embraced.

Rita Thérèse Finnen

Daughter of Alice and Malachi

Daughter of Wisdom, Joseph of the Trinity

Born under the sign of Capricorn

Born under the star of Epiphany

The psalmist says: “God knows the number of the stars and calls them each by name.” (Psalm 147, 4). These days – this day, God’s call is simply this: Rita.



***THIS IS THE DAY***

**Sept. 2, 2016 NC/ Sept. 8, 2016 NY**

**Eulogy of Sr. Rita T. Finnen, DW**

**By Sr. Rosemarie Greco, DW**



DIOCESE OF RALEIGH

Office of the Bishop

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August 26, 2016

Sister Catherine Sheehan, DW  
Provincial  
385 Ocean Avenue  
Islip, NY 11751

Dear Sister Catherine,

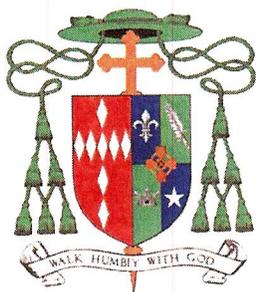
Please accept my heart-felt condolences on the death of Sister Rita Finnen, D.W. Sister Rita was an outstanding woman of faith throughout her life, but especially as she progressed on her journey to our beloved Savior.

Sister Rita's influence on her students as well, as other people in the Greenville community, cannot be underestimated. Her love of God and Church, her deep concern for human rights and her vocation as a consecrated Woman Religious in today's society are just a few of the virtues that Sister Rita exhibited over these many years. She shall stand as an example for all for many years to come.

Be assured of my prayerful support for you and all the Daughters of Wisdom as I join with your Community in commending Sister Rita to our Lord. May she rest in peace with our Blessed Mother and all the saints in the heavenly Kingdom.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge  
Bishop of Raleigh



DIocese of Raleigh

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September 2, 2016

Reverend Romen A. Acero  
Saint Gabriel Catholic Church  
3250 Dickinson Avenue  
Greenville, NC 27834

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I extend my heartfelt condolences to each of you, especially the Sisters of the Daughters of Wisdom, as you mourn the death of your beloved Sister Rita. Due to a commitment on my schedule, I am unable to join you in celebrating this Funeral Mass, but know that I am certainly present with you in prayer and spirit today.

Sister Rita was a dynamic presence in our Diocese since her coming to Greenville in 1978. Her teaching at East Carolina University and Pitt County Memorial Hospital had great impact on health care in eastern North Carolina as she helped prepare and mold those in the nursing profession. Her deep love for people and education left an impact that will be felt for many years to come.

Sr. Rita's life as a consecrated Woman Religious stands as an example to all of us as she lived her devotion to God every day through her commitment to Church in her profound witness as a Daughter of Wisdom. She was also devoutly committed to the parish of Saint Gabriel as well as the priests, staff, and the parish ministries over the years. Her faith in our Blessed Lord and our Blessed Mother was only strengthened as her health deteriorated and her dependency upon God's grace became more evident to everyone around her.

Please be assured of my continued prayers and know of those offered by the faithful of our Diocese, who surround you now with the power of faith in Christ our hope. May Our Lord bless each of you with the gift of His peace and grant our dear Sister Rita the fullness of Life everlasting.

With sentiments of deep sympathy, I am

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge  
Bishop of Raleigh



*In Loving Memory*

**Sister Rita Finnen, D.W.**

Born: January 6, 1931

Religious Profession of Vows: February 2, 1952

Died: August 26, 2016

According to Rabbi Rami Shapiro, there  
is a saying in Judaism:

...that death is experienced as a kiss of  
God. Just as God breathed into us our  
first breath, so God kisses us as we  
breathe into God our final breath. They  
say this is a moment of ecstatic love.