Sister Rose Irene Calvert, OP
1937 – 2016

Sister Rose Irene, baptized Mary Ann Calvert, was born on November 14, 1937, in Detroit. She was the fourth of five children born to Leon and Veronica (Good) Calvert. In her autobiography, Sister Rose wrote the following about her family.

My father came to this country as a young adult from Munich, Germany. Actually, his last name was Schweitzer which he quickly changed upon his arrival [because he was] afraid he would be sent back to his own country. My father was a printer by trade, but later he and my Mom managed their own Calvert 5¢ to $1 Stores. They seemed to function well as business partners. During our growing up years we were raised much like children today. Since Mom worked during the day, someone cared for us. I had three older brothers and a younger sister.

Mary Ann was two years old when the family moved to St. Augustine Parish in Detroit, where she met the Adrian Dominicans. Her mother was not Catholic, and it was through the Sisters, primarily Sister Charles Borromeo, that she first became interested in Catholicism. Eventually the family was baptized.

Mary Ann began taking music lessons when she attended St. Augustine School. In her autobiography, she wrote, “I did not enjoy [lessons] and I never learned the staff so [during] those early years I made little progress. One day I realized I could play popular music if I practiced and this spurred me on.”

It was also in these early years that she decided she wanted to be a Sister. In her autobiography, she wrote:

[When I was] a freshman at Dominican High School, Sister Thomas Gertrude instructed me in piano playing. She also became a person I could turn to at this time when my parents were seeking a divorce. It was during the summer of that year that a nearby parish hired me to play the organ. This was a real boost for me to see that I was capable at this young age to fill an organist position. I asked to [attend St. Joseph] Academy at the beginning of my sophomore year so I could be nearer to the Sisters and see how they lived.

At the end of her junior year at the Academy, Mary Ann entered the postulate on June 27, 1954, and six months later received her religious name, Sister Rose Irene.

Following profession in December 1955, Sister Rose Irene was assigned to teach and serve as musician in parish schools for the next fifteen years. This meant that, in addition to classroom teaching, she also give music lessons after school and on Saturday and played the organ for liturgies. Her greatest challenge, however, was in the classroom. She wrote:
My greatest problem as a teacher was a lack of discipline with the students. The burden of classroom teaching caused much anxiety and nervousness for me which I encountered daily. Now as I look back, a serious bout with depression occurred during those first years and later was identified as manic depression [bipolar disorder]. At times it demanded hospitalization and many times beginning life over again after treatment. This became the daily cross in my life – accepting whatever demands the disease required.

In spite of this handicap, I enjoyed a tremendously healthy body which enabled me to recover over and over again from depression periods and begin again. God blessed my life with so many gifts.

By the 1970s, Sister Rose Irene was able to choose liturgical music as her ministry. She began her graduate studies at St. Joseph College in Rensselaer, Indiana, and received her master’s degree in liturgical music in 1976. From the 1970s to the 1990s, Sister Rose Irene served in seven parishes as liturgical music director, worship coordinator, and minister of music. She also served as worship coordinator at the Motherhouse in the 1980s for four years.

But her five years at Our Lady of Refuge Parish in Orchard Lake, Michigan, held a special place in her memory. She wrote:

The church was still being built when I was hired and I had the privilege of beginning every aspect of parish worship with the pastor, Father Deitz, who was anxious to establish meaningful liturgy. He and I met and engaged parishioners in active [implementation] of the plans. This was a very satisfying experience for me.

Sister Juanita Flores, a gifted violinist, was studying for her doctorate at the University of Michigan. She responded to my request for musicians to enhance the liturgies at Our Lady of Refuge and stayed with me often on weekends. We truly enjoyed each other’s company, while the parish benefitted from her talent.

Sister Rose Irene retired in 1990 and returned to Adrian in 2000 to live at the Dominican Life Center/Maria. She wrote,

Being here at Maria is an enriching experience. It is a joy to have so many Sisters around me. There is time to do things I never had time to do, such as taking on little projects. However, I have remained in a deep depression for the past two and a half years. Changes in my medication do not seem to be able to modify this situation. I continue to hope and pray that relief will come soon.

Sister Rose Irene Calvert died on March 29, 2016, at the age of seventy-eight and in the sixty-first year of her religious profession.
Sister Maria Goretti Browne, Vicaress, of the Adrian Dominican Vicariate, shared the following story.

While at St. Brigid Parish in Detroit [in the 1960s], Rose presented an organ concert in fulfillment of a requirement for her bachelor’s degree in Applied Music from Siena Heights College. The day before the concert, someone smashed into the car she was driving. She was quite shaken up and, of course, the car was severely damaged. But she was able to perform [the next day] as scheduled. She felt it was not her best, but her performance was accepted.

Sister Rosemarie Kieffer sent the following message.

Rose came to St. William Parish in Walled Lake as the music minister. She had the gift of music and her choir loved her as she prepared them for liturgy. She often shared with me that people didn’t realize or understand the complexity of what depression was all about. It was a long time before we understood all the implications and various mental diseases. I am not sure we do today. Rose loved community and was a woman of deep faith. She loved her family and I enjoyed knowing them especially her sister, Rosie.

In her homily Sister Rose Ann Schlitt shared the following thoughts on the Gospel passage that also was reflected in Sister Rose Irene’s life.

Today as we celebrate our sister Rose Irene’s return to God, I would like to focus on the angel as God’s bearer of Good News. After the earthquake the angel came and rolled away the stone – and sat on it! A most dramatic statement of supernatural triumph - as if to say “God did it!” And I’m here to tell you about it! The angel then proceeds to calm the fears of the women and to express understanding about their search for Jesus who had been crucified. This same statement, “Do not be afraid,” is exactly what Jesus told them later on in the story. It was the common statement when the supernatural realm broke into the natural.

The angel commissioned the women beyond the tomb and told them to go quickly and tell his disciples: “He has risen from the dead. Now he is going ahead of you to Galilee; that is where you will see him. Look! I have told you.” And suddenly coming to meet them was Jesus, saying, “Rejoice!” He directs them to go carry the glad tidings to his disciples. And together with Rose, we, too, say “Yes!”

Our crowd was named for Divine Providence, and this helped to shape our early spirituality.

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1 Matthew 28:1-10
**Right:** Sister Juanita Flores enjoys her retirement party at the Latino Catholic Pastoral Center, Detroit, with her good friend, Sister Rose Irene Calvert, 1997.

**Left:** Sister Mary LaMantia, left, with Sister Rose Irene  
**Right:** Christmas 1991, from left: Sisters Rose Irene, Jean Elizabeth Nugent, and Eileen Therese Majercik.
Jubilee Celebration of the Divine Providence crowd, back row, from left, Sisters Marianne O’Neill, Ellen Murphy, Marlene Ptaszynski, Marilyn Francoeur, Clarice Moyle, Esther Kennedy, Margaret Andrezik, Rose Ann Schlitt, Jeanne Stickling, Gail Himrod, and Norlee McDonnell; front row, from left, Sisters Evelyn Piche, Teresita Ruiz, Mary Ann Letzgus, Ellen Schmitz, Therese Reynolds, Rose Irene Calvert, Joan Baustian, Kay Watt, Virginia Kleckner, and Janet Capone (Prioress).

Left: Sister Rose Irene at piano with Sister Alice Mary Naour during a Jubilee celebration, 1997.