

Sr. Margareta 100th

None of us has complete control over the number of our years. Sickness and accidents can happen to anyone; we cannot choose our parents or the genetic map they give us. And if our parents formed us in faith and love, we had little to do with it; we have no one to thank but God. Still, throughout life we can make good choices about what we eat, how we exercise, whether to pursue meaningful work, to make the right friends, and to keep a happy heart. All these choices can contribute to a long and fruitful life.

The Turner family grew up in Kansas City half a country away from Sister Margareta, so our visits with her - whether here or there - are always an event. She inspires us not just as our mother's sister, but as a nun, a teacher, and a leader. She wanted to be a teacher since fourth grade, and she influenced generations of students with her enthusiasm, knowledge and care. Yet she set aside the job she loved in order to take up congregational leadership as formation director of Good Counsel Academy and then six years as provincial councilor. I still remember Mom answering the phone at home when Margareta called to tell her about these new responsibilities. We couldn't have been more proud. Nor could we have known the challenges Margareta would face in those six years. Sisters in this community were making difficult vocational decisions, all of which Margareta had to respect while holding the community together in hope. She could have accepted another six years of leadership, but her attitude was always, "No way." She missed the classroom, and her greatest reward for those challenging years of community leadership was to return to the job she loved: being a teacher. Like every good teacher, Margareta is first a good student; she reads, she learns new things, she forms strong political views, she cares for the world beyond the convent walls, and she makes judgments for the good of others. In her retirement she continues a ministry of prayer, still giving, still serving.

Looking back over these 100 years is an exercise of gratitude to God. Joshua performed a similar exercise in today's first reading. Gathering all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, he reminded them how they got there: "It was the LORD, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery. He performed those great miracles before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among all the peoples through whom we passed." Joshua urged them to forsake allegiance to other gods and to serve the one God. "As for me and my household," he famously declared, "we will serve the LORD." It wasn't a bad recipe. Joshua lived 110 years.

Sister Margareta, you still have ten years to catch up with Joshua. But if we had 200 years, we could never catch up with you. As a family member, a religious sister, a teacher, and a leader, you have kept your heart focused on one goal: to serve the LORD. You would not want us to pay too much attention to you if it meant turning attention away from God. OK. We are all giving thanks to God and serving the Lord today, but we are disguising it with two words we address to you: Happy Birthday.

Saturday, August 19, 2017