

# Sister Reginald reaches out to the spiritually hungry

I always held a heart of admiration for Sister Mary Reginald Gerdes, an Oblate Sister of Providence. She was our homeroom and biology teacher in our junior year at St. Frances Academy. She was no one whom you would want to be on the wrong side of. She disciplined with her words, and let's not forget her body language, which could correct individuals and a group in just one glance. Sister Reginald, known even today, is fiercely honest and positively challenging. Conversations with Sister Reginald will leave you looking for deeper meaning below the surface of the words articulated at the same time as challenging one to move to a higher level of understanding. Today, she spends most of her free time researching black Catholic history in the United States and teaching others what she has discovered from the witness of the faithful. Yes, she is a great historian and a great teacher who understands how the human stories of people of faith can redesign human history. Perhaps this is why I stood in awe of her, utterly amazed of how she served as an agent of encouragement and evangelization one day last month.

Sister Reginald and I decided to attend a Saturday lecture given by Sister Addie Lorraine Walker, a School Sister of Notre Dame, held at St. Mary's Spiritual Center on Paca Street. Since the lecture was close to noontime, we decided to have lunch at Lexington Market. I wanted to secure a parking place close to the market, but the Saturday crowd prohibited such a discovery. We parked near the St. Jude Shrine to move on to the market.

As we approached the entrance to the market, people rushed to open the door for Sister Reginald and to ask her who she was. Others wanted to talk with her and share something of their lives with her. I felt as though I was intruding in something very personal and richly spiritual as Sister Reginald engaged in conversation with the seekers. We thought we were at the market for our lunch, but God had something else for us to do and witness.

I quickly asked Sister Reginald what her meal choice was and rushed off to gain the purchase. I looked back toward her as she was seated at one of the meal tables while

men and women continued to converse with her. Reflecting so much about these encounters, I returned back with the meal but with no drink. As I placed the meal on the table, I heard Sister Reginald tell a young man in a way that only she could say and get away with it: “Don’t get in that rut; Jesus can help you and your brother.” I left to secure our drink and a little snack for later since I realized that Sister Reginald was not going to have time for her meal, but rather was engaged in the ministry to feed the spiritually hungry among us.

On my return, a lady moved in and was begging Sister Reginald to place some money in the collection basket for her and say a prayer for her and her family. Sister Reginald assured her that she would and told her that she was praying for her as they spoke to one another. My heart was so full of how God continues to work through the lives of people of faith and how a faithful Sister Reginald understood that faith can redesign human history.

In leaving, I thought of God’s will and purpose for us that day and recalled St Paul’s writing in Romans describing the witness of the Prophet Hosea: “I’ll call the unloved and make them beloved” (Romans 9:25). That’s what Sister Reginald did that day, reminded others of God’s love for them.

Sister Reginald and I agreed to visit our people again at Lexington Market on March 28 at noon. Come join us in this evangelization outreach as we meet between the Mary Mervis and Barron stalls. All are welcomed.

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