

Sayer, Miriam 16 September 1940 - 12 November 2021

Testimony to the grace of God in the life of Miriam Sayer

Miriam was born during the Blitz in war-torn London, into a family which had already experienced much hardship and loss and more was to come. In 1956 the family of eight emigrated to Tasmania and settled in Devonport, where Miriam completed her High School education. They were a church going family. Miriam was deeply faithful all her life. She drew comfort, guidance and joy from worship and daily contemplative practice and reading of scripture. She moved to Hobart to study Education at UTAS and there she joined the Student Christian Movement. Through the SCM she met some Quakers and she began to be drawn towards Quakerism.

Her family members were deeply important to Miriam, there was always a welcome for them and she took a special interest in her nieces and nephews, discovering and nurturing the uniqueness and abilities in each one.

As a young teacher, Miriam served with Australian Volunteers Abroad teaching for four years on Manus Island. Returning to Tasmania she taught in a variety of schools in the north and in Hobart, including The Friends School where she introduced many creative activities, such as running a photographic competition and making a series of tapestries depicting scenes from the Book of Kells. Her wide-ranging interests and passionate desire to enable people to be the best they could be made her an excellent teacher. In the late 1980's, she retired from school teaching and turned her focus towards working with people with special needs, providing occupational therapy in a nursing home and becoming involved in the newly forming L'Arche community in Hobart as a part-time and sometimes live-in assistant, calling forth gifts of hospitality, creativity and caring. She loved to sing and helped people cast off their self-consciousness and join in, whether around the house, in L'Arche liturgies or by joining a choir.

As a community member in L'Arche and the Quaker meeting and as a friend, Miriam exercised many gifts. Although Miriam met life with joyful exuberance and quirky humour, where quiet discernment was appropriate, she would listen deeply, seemingly not taking part in the wandering discourse, but then come out with a wise insight which would throw new light on the issue. She was not afraid to challenge a wrong idea and would not tolerate injustice. She was a generous and perceptive friend, a deep listener who would make the person speaking feel truly heard. She never stopped being a seeker. An avid reader, she took part in discussion groups, worship sharing, Bible studies and friendship groups.

In the mid '90's Miriam followed a leading to travel to Northumbria in England to seek out a semi-monastic community where she lived a life of hospitality, celebration, prayer and work. Their worship was based on the Celtic Daily Prayer Book and she continued that practice for the rest of her life. While in the UK Miriam went to Ireland and was inspired by the life of Saint Brigit whose byword was "availability". She also spent some time in a small contemplative community in Canberra, The Gathering Place. These experiences fed her desire to live a contemplative life, a life of welcome, friendship and service.

We give thanks for the grace of God in the life of our Friend Miriam Sayer.