Rose Tillemans was born in 1923 in Minnesota, Minnesota to Katherine Welch and William P. Tillemans. She and her four brothers grew up a block from St. Edward's Catholic Church, or as she put it, "literally in the shadow of the church."

After completing high school Rose attended the College of St. Catherine in Saint Paul, majoring in Library Science and minoring in English and Sociology.

Rose's time at St. Catherine laid the groundwork for Peace House Community. As she remembered, "[T]he moderator of Our Lady's Sodality [at St. Catherine University] directed us young women to go out by twos and find "the poor" on Saturday afternoons. My roommate and I took a County Road B bus and visited the Ramsey County Poor Farm. It was my introduction to poor people in every bent and gnarled shape, emotionally distraught, without anything to their names. I held these people in my heart with deep concern. Little did I know what turn my life would take twenty-eight years later."

Following her graduation Rose worked as a librarian in a neuropsychiatric hospital, but she found the job boring and felt a call to join the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet. She felt some confusion over this, explaining "Since we were largely a teaching and nursing order, and I wanted to be neither, I wondered what they were going to do with me. Well, they sent me right back to college to pick up educational credits at St. Catherine." From 1950 to 1974, Rose served as a teacher and librarian with the CSJs, despite the emotional toll it took on her. "Since I have a very dominant anxiety gene, there were many hospitalizations and time-out periods. I call them 'crack-ups' and try to add some humor and acceptance to those rough years."

In 1974, the CSJs asked for someone to take over the free store on Nicollet Ave. Rose asked for the position, and for the next ten years she ran the store. During this time Rose developed a vision of a community day center for poor and homeless people who wanted a place to be with others seeking spirituality, friendship and affirmation. "In my dreams I called this place Peace House," she wrote later. It would serve "poor and homeless people who wanted a place to be with others seeking spirituality, friendship and affirmation. ... I did not have in mind any formal structure for Peace House. I wanted it to be simple, safe, and friendly, a gathering center for sharing stories, praying together for those who were falling through the cracks."

Despite neighborhood opposition Rose opened PHC on October 17, 1985, but the first day was anticlimactic. "I waited from noon until 4:00 p.m., and not a single person dropped in." Gradually, though, Rose's persistence paid off. "After about two weeks and the purchase of a coffee pot and doughnuts, people started to come in twos and threes.

As Peace House Community became established in the 1980s and 1990s Rose became involved in political demonstrations against oppression in the United States and Central America. She also wrote several short books of prayers and poems questioning the Catholic hierarchy. Despite her varied activities, Rose never lost her personal contact with the poor she sought to serve.

"I dance every day to the truths that express for me what makes sense: giving love, caring for others in their needs, working for justice, sharing tenderness, accepting the things I cannot change, working with the poor who must often face insurmountable obstacles, caring for the Earth and all its children."

Rose died on July 5, 2002 at age 79, but her legacy lives on at Peace House Community.