



Wake Stories of Ann Ida, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, June 8, 2018

Dr. Jo Ann Rooney, President of Loyola University Chicago *(Read by Sister Kate Hendel, BVM)*

On behalf of the Loyola University Chicago community, I write to express our solidarity with all of you in mourning the passing of Ann Ida and, even more so, join you in the celebration of her amazing life.

Ann Ida's ability to adeptly steer Mundelein through the culturally tempestuous years of her presidency not only made a positive impact on the students of that time but also continues to influence Loyola University, making it a stronger, more diverse institution today. From a personal perspective, looking over the course of 150 years of history for Loyola University and Mundelein College, I feel as if I am standing on the shoulders of giants in leading Loyola. Ann Ida is one of the women whose life provides inspiration. She led Mundelein from 1957 through 1975 during some interesting times, to say the least! Most influential was her conviction that higher education needed to be available not only to women but to all people, regardless of their backgrounds or faith tradition. This "radical" stance during that period continues to serve as a model of civil discourse so desperately needed in our contemporary society.

I was fortunate to be able to spend some time getting to know Ann Ida last year during a trip to Mount Carmel and her trademark dignity, respect, and profound insight continued to be descriptors of her. A lasting impression from hearing about how she led is that she was diplomatically able to listen to diverse perspectives and come to a consensus that respected all sides. Truly, her life is one for us to emulate in its graciousness and the determination to do the right thing. She made a real and lasting difference in the world, which is what we are all called to do.

Be assured of my prayers and those of the Loyola University community for Sr. Ann Ida and all the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Sister Dodie Dwight, BVM

Jan Sisler, Director of the Gannon Center for Women & Leadership at Loyola University Chicago and friend of Ann Ida and the BVMs, is not able to be with us today because of key responsibilities at the university. However, her heart clearly is with us. Jan credits Ann Ida with helping her make the decision to remain in Chicago instead of attending the funeral. She used one of the discernment processes that she learned from Ann Ida. "Where could I do the most good?" The following is her letter of June 4 to Mundelein Alumnae.

Janet Sisler, Director of the Gannon Center for Women & Leadership, Chicago *(Read by Sister Dodie Dwight, BVM)*

Sister Ann Ida was a source of great leadership, wisdom, and grace for us while we were young and as we continued to grow as women leaders in our Church and world.

One of the joys I had as the director of the Gannon Center from Women Leadership was the chance to be in direct communication with Sister Ann Ida. I learned much from her, and at each encounter, I came away with a deeper appreciation for her sheer genius and immense love. Over the course of the years, she said that she had just two regrets in her life: that she had not insisted that Jean Dolores attain a Ph.D. and that the Equal Rights Amendment was not ratified by the State of Illinois. With Sister Jean earning a Honoris Causa Ph.D. in 2016 and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois this last week, one can only imagine that Sister Ann Ida could begin the next chapter of her eternal life with no regrets on this end.

Sister Ann Ida frequently asked me to remind our alumnae of how deeply proud she was of us and our contributions as women leaders. Today, I will take the opportunity to join with you in expressing how deeply proud we all are of Sister Ann Ida Gannon and the transformative influence she had upon our lives. May God comfort us all with her faith in the Community of Saints. In deep sympathy, Janet Sisler, Director.

Bob McGuire, Biographer

One of the memories I have of her actually is not in the book. She would say, "I'll tell you this, but don't write it down." I asked her a question about the Nuns on the Bus. She didn't know anything about the Nuns on the Bus, so I explained a little bit about Sister Simone Campbell and what they were trying to accomplish. She thought for a moment and said, "One of the important things is that as a community of religious, we always have to be able to respond to the times."

I thought about that because her life, as you know, was always in response to change. How many times she was, you might say, ahead of the curve. I can think just recently when they passed the Equal Rights Amendment, which made her 36 years ahead of the State of Illinois. That was only one of many examples. I don't think Mr. Keller was able to make it today. She supported him when the court didn't know if there could be a for-profit university, but she saw the possibility. When the Sputnik went up, she saw the possibility of tapping into federal funds to improve Mundelein College. She was always ahead of the curve.

She accepted an appointment working for President Richard Nixon. I asked her how well that went. She pointed out that she not only worked for Nixon but Ford, Carter, and Reagan. She thought it was a pure sign of God's presence in her life to purify her that three of them had to be Republicans. She worked on Ford's program to have more women in his administration. One of the people in the group, Dr. Boersema, who was the youngest and a wild radical at the time, now a hallowed professor in Seattle. I called him and asked, "Do you remember Sister Ann Ida?" "Of course, I remember her. She was the one who had the voice for women on that committee. She was the one who consolidated the ideas for which Richard Nixon took credit." Always ahead of the curve.

In the conversation I had with her about the Nuns on the Bus, she talked about three ways people could respond to change. You could be angry about it and then resist it, fight against it and make yourself miserable. You could be indifferent, shrug your shoulders and just accept and keep your head down. Or, you could embrace it and in doing that, see its possibilities and create from it. As I think of the life of Ann Ida, she was that third person, who was able to create possibilities out of change, see things that others didn't see, and make from it something wonderful that she could pass of to others.

Sister Mary Healey, BVM

I want to repeat a story that Ann Ida told me. On the memorial card that many of you picked up at the door is a picture of her widely seen in other places. When Ann Ida became president of Mundelein, she had a picture taken for publicity purposes. It was in various publications. After some years, she was asked for a publicity picture immediately. She realized that she had taken off the religious habit and looked quite different. Chicago was in the middle of a terrible snowstorm, so she phoned a photographer down the street, changed her clothes, wrapped her head in plastic (fortunately her hair looked decent that day) and had a janitor drive her to the photographer. She told him he could just leave her there; it didn't matter how wet she got on the way back, but she had to look good on the way down. She had her picture taken and sent it to wherever it was supposed to go and used it for many years afterward. It was enlarged and hangs on the wall of Mundelein. After about fifteen years, she announced her retirement and immediately received requests for a publicity photo. She figured that she couldn't use that fifteen-year-old photo again. Since it was a nice day, she walked down to the same photographer and had her photo taken again. Later, when she looked at it, she realized she was wearing the same blouse with the embroidered collar in both photos. You have a copy of the more recent one.

Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM

I have many stories about Ann Ida, but this one is my favorite. In 1972, the BVMs are just beginning to adjust to their new way of governance. I was on the BVM Senate Steering and Agenda Committee and found Ann Ida, Sister Benedict Phelan, Sister Dorita Clifford, and several others who have gone to God. I ended up the chair. I have to give that background because I was in my mid-thirties and to say I was nervous would be putting it mildly. We were at a meeting and Sister Ann Ida insisted that for the future Senate, we wanted a keynote speaker. She said, "We need a young sister for the keynote." That was often Ann Ida's theme for young women. I'm sitting there with my head in hand thinking, "Now what?" She repeated it again, so finally, in desperation, I said, "Well, I know one and I will ask her." The "one" was Helen Maher Garvey. The rest is history.

Joan Leland Spittler, Former BVM

I was a BVM for 10 years and lived with Ann Ida at the end of those ten years. I have many, many fond memories of her at Mundelein. She was a very, very progressive woman from my experience. I felt delighted that I was able to be at Mundelein with her as our president. I have one really special memory that I always recall when I think of Ann Ida. It was when I was leaving the community. I had met Tom Spittler, who was at Loyola, and we had known each other for a couple of years. I decided that I was going to leave and we were going to get married. I went to tell Ann Ida and she was absolutely lovely. She said, "I feel very happy for you, Joan. You and Tom are the church of the future." She was very forward-looking and very kind and loving. Of all the things about her that I enjoyed during my years at Mundelein, that was the highlight of my experience with her. She was truly a lovely woman.

Patsy Crowley, OSB

I am a Benedictine and I am happy to be here to represent our community for Sister Joan, Ann Ida's sister. I wanted to tell you a story about my mother and Ann Ida. They were high school classmates at The Immaculata. My mother was a child of the Sacred Heart. She went to Pine Grove Sacred Heart School for all of her grammar school. She didn't always feel like a child of the Sacred Heart, but her mother had wanted her to be there. In eighth grade, her family was going to move up to Sheridan Road. She convinced her parents that she wanted to go to The Immaculata. For the two years that Sheridan Road was being built, she went to The Immaculata. When she got there, she didn't know anybody because she really wasn't involved in the parishes of the rest of the students. Her father, who

was a very humble, entrepreneur, said, "Why don't you invite a person from your class to the football game?" She invited Ann Ida and they became friends from then on. The funny part of this is that they were not the same age but in the same class. My mother was held back one year because she fooled around in class, as was the story. My mother was born in 1913 and Ann Ida was two years younger. At the end of the football game, they went back to my mother's home. The family lived at 3500 Lakeshore Drive, which is right next to Temple Shalom. My grandfather said to Jen (Ann Ida's baptismal name was Genevieve), "How are you going to get home?" "I'll take a bus." My grandfather said, "Oh no, I'll call the chauffeur." The last time I saw her a couple of years ago, she told me that story again. They were fast friends and had many similarities including both receiving the Laetare Medal. I'm delighted to be here for my family as well as for my community.

Dennis Keller, DeVry, Inc.

I apologize for the four of us coming in late, but there were thunderstorms all around Chicago so our plane could not takeoff until Sister Ann Ida intervened and pushed the storms away. My partner, Ron Taylor, and I started an educational organization that grew and grew, in part with the help of Sister Ann Ida. We started DeVry, Inc., and the Keller Graduate School of Management. We started with seven students and now we have about 200,000 students around the world. Ann Ida was instrumental in so many ways in helping us and the students and the faculty do that.

She has a national reputation in higher education, as you know. I was disappointed that the wonderful obituary in the Chicago Sun-Times didn't talk about that. It talked all about Chicago and Loyola, and those are wonderful things. However, literally, hundreds of institutions of higher education and thousands of students benefited from her leadership and her attention. I knew several things mentioned on her national footprint, but there were so many that I had to write them down when I went to check our records and did a little research beyond that. Most important to us and to higher education in the Midwest, she was the chair of the board of the North Central Association. North Central represents the 20 states in the Midwest, the largest of six regional college and university accreditation associations. North Central accredited literally over a thousand colleges and universities. Sometimes it seemed like she was able to visit and talk with all of them and make each one of them better. She certainly made ours better and better. In addition to that, she chaired the Association of American Colleges, a national organization, and the Association of Governing Boards in Higher Education.

In the 1960s, she was also one of the first women to serve on the New York Stock Exchange Board. We met Sister Ann Ida because she served on the Northern Illinois Gas Board. Marvin Chandler, who was the father of one of my close friends and classmates, knew what we were doing. He mentioned to Sister Ann Ida that there was this interesting thing going on and suggested she check on it and she did. She saw through our ideas and into our hearts and said she was going to help and she did. She sent students. Just having the chair of one of the most respected accrediting institutions on the planet speak up for what became DeVry University was incredibly, amazingly helpful. We worked as hard as we could to make what she saw happen and do it right.

She was involved in many other organizations – the Newberry Library, WTTW Education TV. She was a real champion of the Equal Rights Amendment, which finally passed recently in Illinois. She served for years on the national board for the Girl Scouts. The good that she did through her years, especially in education, which is the heart and secret of progress in humanity, cannot be exaggerated. It would take hours, maybe days, to name all of the places, students, faculties and institutions that she helped. I don't

know how to be more thankful for who she was and what she did for so many. I feel immensely grateful and fortunate for knowing her.

Tom Spittler

The prayer we read earlier mentioned, “the compassionate heart [who] enriched countless lives.” I was certainly one of those lives. Being in touch with the community through Ann Ida back in the 1960s, I received a tremendous welcome, a heartfelt expression of joy with the community and with her wonderful willingness to accept Joan and myself and our decision. I have to contrast that with the acceptance I got when I went to my superior and told him that I was leaving to get married. The Jesuits had a different view of things. We won’t talk about that. Ann Ida enriched our lives greatly, and the lives of the children we raised and their children. We are some of the countless people that her compassionate heart has touched.

Sister Catherine Dunn, BVM

When I was elected president at Clarke College in 1984, shortly thereafter, I began to receive little notes and those notes were from Ann Ida. Always loving, always compassionate, always caring. I looked forward to receiving them. She did that for a long time. SM Benedict did the same thing. I felt so blessed that two women who were presidents of higher education institutions were so loving, so caring, and so compassionate to a young president to send her notes of encouragement. For that, I shall always be grateful.

Sister Joyce Cox, BVM

I was Dean of Students at Mundelein College for a couple of years with Ann Ida. She called me into her office one day and said, “Joyce, I’m going to make you the moderator of the Black Student Union, Macuba. I said, “Sister Ann Ida, I’m from Butte, Mont. I really haven’t had anything to do with adult black where I can be helpful.” She said, “Don’t worry. They will teach you.” Well, they did teach me because their gatherings started at 11 o’clock on a Saturday night and ended at 5 o’clock in the morning. During those two years that I was the moderator, those young women taught me so much. It was because Ann Ida trusted them that I learned. I didn’t know what would happen to them, but I would learn. Just a second little story. She called me in one day and said, “The trucks that are dropping off goods at Mundelein are parking out in front. As Dean of Students, she should see that no truck or car is parking out in front on Sheridan Road. That just shouldn’t be.” I answered, “Of course. Yes, surely, I’ll take care of it.” About two days later, the fire truck was parked out in front on Sheridan Road. I knew I had to obey Ann Ida, so I went out and said, “I’m sorry chief, but you’ve got to move this truck.”

Sister Peggy Devereux, BVM

What I want to tell you happened a long, long time ago. It’s been over 60 years and I haven’t forgotten. One day at St. Agatha’s, which is a poor parish in Chicago, the superior got a call from Sister Ann Ida saying that they had bought all new beds for the girls and that they would like to give their used beds to the poor and could we get some men with trucks to pick them up. I thought it was wonderful. They took us out there and they filled the vehicles with all kinds of beds. Ann Ida came out and said, “Before you leave, I’d like you to pull around to the back of the building.” We did and she took all of the men there into the deep freeze and gave all of them frozen food to take home to their families.

Sister Mary Anne Hoopes, BVM

We all know that Ann Ida’s accomplishments are many. I have a story that speaks of her tenderness, her sensitive, her compassion. In 1976, my father died. I was an only child and I had the house to clear out.

One summer morning, Ann Ida called me and said, "I'm coming out today to help you." I thought, "Ann Ida's coming out to help me?" She arrived and asked, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I have a basement to clear out and the garage. Let's do the garage." She was tall and we could lift some of the boxes down from the shelves. We began emptying boxes and shorting material. She came upon on box that said "Mundelein College Father's Club." She said, "Oh, let's see what is in there." She sat on the stairs in the garage and went through all the material. Every so often, she said, "I think I would like to keep this. I think this might be something we need in the archives." It was hot that day and the boxes were very dirty even though we had tried to dust them. A couple of times, Ann Ida wiped the sweat from her face so she had black marks on her face. A neighbor woman came whose daughter had gone to Mundelein. I said, "This is Sister Ann Ida. Perhaps you remember that she was the president." The woman said, "Sister Ann Ida? The president?" I remember that afternoon I went to the closet and got Ann Ida a towel and a washcloth so that she could wash her face and drive home. I have never forgotten her goodness, her kindness, and her tenderness.

Sue Imhoff, Former Mundelein Student

I went to Mundelein 1972-1973 on a sabbatical from teaching. I had many great teachers – Sister Carol Frances Jegan, Anne Carr, who taught me many classes and directed my thesis, Jean Dolores Schmidt was Dean of Women and Academics, and Ann Ida was president. What I remember about Ann Ida is that she knew all of our names. That made me feel special. I know that she has many accomplishments and she did great things. I think that one of her gifts I remember most was that she made all of us feel very special.

Joan Matuga, Niece

She was a favorite person in our family. She was the heart of the family. My sister Kathy and I were raised with special love and care from our aunt. She was always there when we needed her. She was with my mother and my uncle John when they were sick. She was there for all of our First Communions. She was there for all of our children and she babysat our kids. I was a student at Mundelein and was very happy there. I am glad I was able to go there. After I graduated, my aunt retired, but I went back to take more classes there. She said, "Joan, I would love to watch your daughter while you go back to Mundelein." I took three extra classes and Ann Ida took care of Carrie during every single class. She was a wonderful person. Listening to the stories, every one of them is so wonderful. She was a wonderful person; she cared for everyone in the family. I can't tell you how grateful I am that I can be here and say these things. She was a wonderful person. We were very lucky that she lived 103 years. She's up there with God right now, I'm sure.