



Eulogy of Sister Ann Ellen Quirk, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, Sept. 28, 2018

Good afternoon and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Ann Ellen Quirk.

Mariellyn Quirk was born on Feb. 8, 1931, in Milwaukee, Wis., to William and Margaret Roe Quirk. She joined older siblings Catherine and William and was followed by Robert and Margaret. Her father worked as a manufacturer in a bottle company while her mother managed the home.

Mariellyn graduated from Holy Angels Academy and then attended Alverno College in Milwaukee for one year before entering the congregation on Sept. 8, 1949. She received the name Ann Ellen upon her reception on March 19, 1950, professed first vows on March 19, 1952, and lived 69 years as a BVM.

Ann Ellen's first mission was as a music teacher at St. Rose grade school in Wilmington, Ill. She served as a music teacher at St. Joseph in Rock Island, Ill., St. Mary in Clinton, Iowa; and St. Tarcissus and St. Jerome, both in Chicago, but returned to St. Rose three times among and between those assignments. A former student from St. Rose wrote, "I was in first grade when I met her. All the girls in my class . . . were in awe of her. She was so kind and beautiful, and so much fun! She taught us to sing, play the piano, and dance. We learned how to square dance, and of course, how to do the Irish jig. We all thought we were her 'favorite.' She was my teacher, my mentor, my friend."

In 1980, Ann Ellen began serving St. Rose in parish ministry and continued to do so for the next 35 years. She wore many hats during that time – pastoral associate, music director, liturgist, and director of religious education. She trained communion ministers, organized hospital and nursing home visitations, worked with hospice to counsel the terminally ill and helped families plan beautiful funeral services to honor their deceased loved ones. She also founded the St. Rose Booster Club and the Christian Help Association, an ecumenical organization devoted to the special needs of the community.

Ann Ellen is best known, however, for establishing the Kuzma Care Cottage, a distribution center for food and supplies for the poor supported by all the churches in the Wilmington area. The project began in her music classroom when she encouraged students to bring non-perishable items to share with the less fortunate. Eventually the program moved to a house owned by St. Rose Parish and grew to serve hundreds of families every month. In addition to providing food, Ann Ellen taught parenting skills and budget management and, with the help of local agencies, provided job counseling, medical care and emergency funds. "Never say no" was her mantra and the Gospel value that drove her mission to the hungry, the homeless, the abused, the sorrowing and despairing in Wilmington and the neighboring rural areas was "Whatever you [do] for one of the least of mine, you [do] for me,"

Ann Ellen was recognized numerous times for her work. She was named "Woman of the Year" by the Wilmington Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, received the "Community Activity Appreciation Award" from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, was recognized in proclamations by Will County and an Illinois state senator, and received the De La Salle Award given by Lewis University to honor her leadership and community service. In addition, September

1999 was declared "Sister Ann Ellen Month," and a portion of a Wilmington Main Street received the honorary designation "Sr. Ann Ellen B.V.M. Parkway." Some called her the "unofficial mayor of Wilmington."

Ann Ellen would be the first to deflect the praise to her countless volunteers. "She who does God's work gets God's pay," she would say, laughing as they nodded in agreement. However, every volunteer received a personal, handwritten "thank you" from her. No wonder she was held in such high esteem that she could call anyone in town at any time if she needed something for her people. The reverse was also true. Even the police called upon her to deal with one of her clients who was drunk and lying in filth on a motel floor. Ann Ellen arrived and said in her most severe teacher voice, "Get up off that floor this minute!" He complied immediately, of course.

When Ann Ellen retired and moved to Mount Carmel in 2015, she had given 56 years, the last 20 while battling a rare form of cancer, to the people of Wilmington and the surrounding area. A journalist with the *Kankakee Daily Journal* wrote, "This is a woman who puts others before herself. Someone who finds joy in generosity. Someone who dreams of winning the lottery so she could build a safe house for those with nowhere else to go." A volunteer commented, "She's a saint. She's everybody's mother and caretaker." In response to the recognition, Ann Ellen, humble as always, replied simply, "You do the work that you do. You do it for the love of the people and you do it for the love of God. I am grateful to God for everything."

Her biography for the De La Salle Award read, "A true servant of the needy, Sister Ann Ellen sees Christ in everyone whom she encounters. She lives the Gospel values, loving God and neighbor as self, and affirms in her work the mission of the Sisters of Charity to help others experience acceptance and true freedom in God's steadfast love."

After many weeks of quiet waiting, Ann Ellen heard Jesus calling, "Come, [Ann Ellen], you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kin[g]dom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34). Thank you, Ann Ellen, for being a shining example of loving service. May you rest in peace.