



Eulogy of Sister Muriel McCarthy, BVM (Baptist)
Marian Hall Chapel, Nov. 6, 2018

Good morning and welcome to the celebration of the life of our Sister Muriel McCarthy.

Muriel Ellen McCarthy was born on Jan. 5, 1921, in San Francisco to Michael and Mary Campbell McCarthy, joining siblings Dolores and Francis. Her father, born in County Cork, Ireland, was one of “San Francisco’s Finest” – a mounted police officer. Muriel recalled watching her father ride in every parade. Her mother, a San Francisco native, was an excellent seamstress who learned the trade as a teenage apprentice to a Jewish tailor.

Muriel was a proud graduate of the St. Paul School, having completed all grades from kindergarten through high school within its walls. “I loved the school,” she commented. “Sister Mary St. Julian Flaherty was my special friend and favorite teacher.”

Together Muriel and classmate Julia Burke, better known as our deceased Sister Veronica Burke, left San Francisco together for Dubuque. They entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1939, beginning Muriel’s 79 years in religious life. She received the name Baptist upon her reception on March 19, 1940, and professed her first vows on March 19, 1942.

Following her profession, Muriel was sent to teach kindergarten at St. Francis Xavier in Kansas City, Mo. “This, to me, seemed to be disastrous,” she wrote, “since I am neither artistically nor musically inclined.” After a mission at St. Bernard in Los Angeles, Muriel, along with Sisters Gilberta Gross and Dolores Black, opened Our Lady of Lourdes in Tujunga, Calif., in 1949. She taught multiple grades during her six years there and called her students “an inspiration.” She returned a decade later to serve as principal.

In subsequent missions, Muriel was an elementary teacher at St. Anne in Santa Ana, Calif.; St. Paul in San Francisco; and Our Lady of Angels in Chicago. She taught secondary classes at St. Vincent in Petaluma, Calif. Many mornings, as the other sisters were preparing to drive the car to school, she would ask them to take her books. Then, she would enjoy walking the mile to school and the opportunity to connect with the people she met along the way.

Muriel’s favorite mission was Assumption in East Los Angeles where she served as principal and eighth grade teacher from 1961-1967. “It was a poor area, many [were] children of immigrants,” she commented. “Once when students came from another school for a game, our [students] were astonished. ‘Look,’ they said, ‘they are all blondes!’” During her time at Assumption, she “learned how important it was to let the immigrants, Mexican people in particular, know that they were loved.” A timely message almost fifty years later.

Muriel ministered in education for 45 years. “Eventually, I taught [all the] grades,” she wrote. “It was fun to tell a pupil who insisted that he ‘never had that’ that he certainly did because I taught it to him!” In 1997, Muriel received an Educational Award from T.I.M.E., not the magazine. A T.I.M.E. award, which stood for “Together in the Mission of Education, was presented to alumni of San Francisco Catholic schools who exemplify the philosophy and lessons learned as an elementary student. During the award ceremony, she expressed gratitude for the privilege to attend St. Paul and the opportunity to return there as a teacher years later.

In 1986, Muriel changed her ministerial focus from youth to elderly. She accepted a position with Catholic Charities in Santa Rosa, Calif., in the Office of Aging and Conservatorship. During that time, she worked with our Sister Mary Frances Moore and her sister Dolores at Vigil Light, a residence for seniors. Later, with the desire for more personal contact with her clientele, she ministered to the ill, homebound and especially the elderly, in St Thomas More Parish in San Francisco. Many of the elderly lived in a series of high-rise apartment buildings. Though not poor in the traditional sense of the word, many residents, for a variety of reasons, were without family members to care for them. Muriel planned prayer services, brought the Eucharist, organized home masses, and simply listened. Thirty years later, she continued to receive greetings from several people so very grateful for the attention she showered upon their loved ones.

Muriel completed her 56 years of ministry in California as an office assistant and teacher aide at St Thomas More School in San Francisco. In 1999, she retired and moved to Mount Carmel where she is known to have organized the tearoom.

Family meant so very much to Muriel. She faithfully remembered her relatives on special occasions. Whether it be birthdays, wedding anniversaries, or even Mother's Day and Father's Day, she never missed a chance to contact them. She was completely devoted to her goddaughter Jennifer and took her responsibilities as godmother very seriously. Yearly, she would meet with Jen for a lunch date, to share a movie or perhaps attend a play in downtown San Francisco.

Some may not know that Muriel was a world traveler. She even obtained an international driving license. As a companion to Sister Mary Cyril Soethe, whose family left her substantial funds for the sole purpose of travel, Muriel explored Nova Scotia, Ireland, England, Spain, Japan and Alaska, where she visited the Arctic Circle, to name just a few places.

In a *Salt* interview, Muriel commented, "The examples I have witnessed in the lives of those I have served . . . have given me a greater appreciation of the blessings I have received. I spend more time in thinking, praying, and giving thanks for my life, for the BVM community and the communities in which I have been privileged to have lived and worked." When asked by a friend how she would like BVMs to remember her, she replied, "I loved each one of them very much! I was a happy person who loved people and life!"

As we celebrate Muriel's entrance into eternal life, we echo the words of St. Paul. Muriel, "[we] give thanks to God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in [our] every prayer for you" and for the great gift you have been, and continue to be, to all of us.