



Eulogy of Sister Mary Crimmin, BVM (Agnes)

Marian Hall Chapel, Jan. 28, 2019

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Mary Crimmin.

Mary Margaret Crimmin was born in Chicago on May 12, 1935. She joined her parents Bernard Crimmin and Frances O'Connor and an older sister Frances and was followed by a brother Patrick and sisters Loretta and Marcella. Both of Mary's parents were educated by the BVMs at St. Charles ES in Chicago and her mother graduated St. Mary HS with four years of perfect attendance. Mary attended Our Lady Help of Christians and graduated from The Immaculata HS. After years spent "hanging around these women," Mary found herself imagining what it would be like to be a BVM.

Mary's first grade teacher, SM Ann Patrice Durr, worked diligently to prepare her. In the jargon of the day, Ann Patrice "made her poplins," "sent her to the community," and earned the title "gold star mother." Before boarding the train for Dubuque, Mary put on several fashion shows donned in her newly acquired wardrobe, all the while twirling her new big black umbrella.

Mary entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1953, following in the footsteps of her aunt, SM Cyrilde Crimmin, and her grandaunt, SM Paschalis Cooney. "The excitement of this new adventure overshadowed the fact that I was leaving home," she wrote. "I was being urged on by a strong sense of wanting to give everything to God . . . to become a 'good community woman.'" She received the name Agnes on March 19, 1954, professed first vows on March 19, 1956, and lived 65 years as a BVM.

Mary's first mission was teaching first grade at St. Gilbert in Grayslake, Ill. With no prior teaching experience and no teacher aides, she taught 70 students. "If I'm ever tempted to doubt the Spirit's presence in my life," she commented, "I need only remember those days!" Next, she was sent to St. Anthony in Casper, Wyo., to teach middle and upper grades and coach the girls' volleyball and junior high track even though she had no prior experience in either sport. Somehow, they manage to win a couple of trophies. She also taught junior high and adult education courses at St. Pius in Chicago.

The mid-1960s brought the winds of change. "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow before God most high?" (Micah 6:6). Mary once again sought guidance from the Spirit. "I experienced dramatic shifts in my personal, spiritual and professional life," she wrote. "My previous quest for perfection . . . as a way to give everything to God shifted to a desire to trust the Spirit within." After studying at the Aquinas Institute in Dubuque, Mary served as a pastoral minister at St. Joseph in New Hope, Minn.; Our Lady Help of Christians in Chicago, Ill., and St. Athanasius in Evanston, Ill. She was delighted to return to Our Lady Help of Christians. Her home parish had changed dramatically – from white to mostly black, from a thriving school to one with a declining enrollment. "For five years we, Sisters Mary Martens, Catherine Krippner and I, worked together with the parish staff . . . to help this community realize its potential. I witnessed the strong lived faith of a people who might have easily despaired at the injustice society heaped upon them, but who trusted that God would see them through this struggle. I was challenged and humbled by this experience."

Mary joined the BVM Hispanic ministry in Kankakee, Ill., in 2002, the year of her golden jubilee and Mary Frances Clarke's 200th birthday. While she primarily ministered as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, she also directed the RCIA program, accompanied Hispanics to the healthcare clinic and distributed food at the food pantry. Mary felt deeply connected to Mother Clarke during this time. "Welcoming and guiding newcomers to this country was so basic to Mary Frances' longing . . . It is a powerful way for me to be about helping others enjoy freedom in God's steadfast love." The BVM Hispanic ministry in Kankakee lasted for 18 years until local community members, many beneficiaries of the ministry, assumed the responsibility. In 2014, St. Teresa parish honored Mary and all BVMs who served in Kankakee with the St. Teresa Rose of Spirit Award.

Mary served the BVM congregation as a member of the Motherhouse administrative team from 1983 to 1998, as Regional Representative from 1988 to 1992, and as BVM Life Facilitator from 2010 to 2014. Prayerfulness, humor and witness to patient, graceful aging among the residents deeply moved Mary. "The women living [at Mount Carmel] taught me about graceful transition from full time active ministry to retirement," she wrote. "At each crossroad they continued to live to the fullest, [finding] creative ways to use their gifts to help others." With deep gratitude for her dedicated service, the Marian Hall sisters surprised Mary with a horse drawn carriage ride in honor of her retirement in 2014.

Mary, too, continued to "live to the fullest" in her retirement. She enjoyed listening to music – easy listening, light classical and even a little country especially when participating in her favorite activity – line dancing. Mary and her sisters actually taught line dancing at a BVM regional meeting in Chicago. She was a member of a book club, Schola, and the Sisters Development Network and a volunteer at the BVM Center.

Her final ministry was as Ba Mary (Grandmother Mary) to the Vietnamese Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters living at Mount Carmel. She, Sister Marion Murphy, BVM, and the IHM sisters lived together in Deerfield on the ground floor of the Motherhouse. She worked individually with the sisters, tutoring them in English, proofreading papers, and, most importantly, being a gentle, guiding presence. Every photo of Mary with the IHM Sisters reveals how dearly she loved them.

Mary had many good qualities – hardworking, conscientious, organized, and detail-oriented. However, what made her a "good community woman" was her happy spirit, endearing warmth, good humor, unassuming nature and willingness to serve. A friend commented, "If you met her, you loved her."

"With what shall [Mary] come before the Lord?" With a lifetime of loving, encouraging and assisting others – and the ability to teach line dancing in heaven.