



Eulogy of Sister Deanna Randall, BVM (Mariel)
Marian Hall Chapel, Feb. 7, 2019

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Deanna Randall.

Deanna May Randall was born in Denver, Colo., on July 6, 1937, the first child of Lesley and Margery Pavela Randall. A sister Juanita later joined the family. Deanna and Juanita found additional playmates in their three cousins, the children of their mother's twin sister.

Deanna's family later moved to Texas and then to Oklahoma where she completed high school. She was a member of St. Charles Borromeo parish in Oklahoma City, Okla., when she felt called to a religious vocation. Being unfamiliar with religious orders, she asked her priest, Father Charles Beckman, brother of our Sister Mary Catherine Beckman for direction. He highly recommended the BVM order saying, "There's nobody on the continent like the BVMs." Deanna entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1956, and received the name Mariel upon her reception on March 19, 1957. She professed her first vows on Feb. 3, 1959, making her the first religious from St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Oklahoma City. She lived 62 years as a BVM.

After her first mission at St. Gilbert in Grayslake, Ill., Deanna decided that she wanted to work within poor black communities. She moved to the heart of inner city Chicago to teach at St. Charles, and later at Holy Trinity and St. Callistus. During this time, she was introduced to the Montessori Method of education. After completing her Bachelor's degree at Clarke College and teaching at St. Gregory the Great in Bellerose, N.Y., Deanna attended training to obtain her Montessori certification in 1971.

Deanna dedicated the next 41 years of her life to introducing children and their families to Montessori methods. She taught at Oak Park Montessori in Illinois before the call to serve the poor lead her to establish, direct and teach at Montessori Child Development Center in Denver. Over the next 15 years, although the center moved several times due to building closures or new pastors, it remained true to its mission to serve middle and low-income families.

In 1987, Deanna established and directed a Montessori school at Christ the King parish in Jackson, Miss., where SM Francile Luking, BVM assisted by reading to each child individually. "When the children saw Sister Francile's car pull up, they would excitedly say, 'I want to read!'" commented Deanna. "[She] was like a second mother to me and a wonderful asset to the community." Deanna lovingly cared for Francile in her later years and continued to find ways for her to stay involved with the children.

A decade later, Deanna moved the cabinets made for her by her father and school materials they contained to Jonestown, Miss, a small, black community, except for the religious sisters who worked there. "These are the poorest children I have taught," Deanna remarked. "They come mostly from single parent homes with a very low education level for most parents." Deanna worked for several years in conjunction with a Holy Name sister at the Jonestown Family Center until the Montessori Children's House was completed in 2002. She recalled that she had to convince the builders not to erect walls in the school. When asked why Montessori is appropriate for poor children, she replied, "Children living in poverty have few choices. At school the [children have] many choices of activities and [are] free to choose something that interests them."

Deanna's work, and that of the Holy Names Sisters, was featured in a New York Times article in 2001. The Provincial Director of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus & Mary wrote, "It was a privilege to visit Sister Deanna's classroom and observe firsthand her expertise, knowledge and competence. The pre-school youngsters were totally focused on their tasks as she used her Montessori skills to unleash their creativity. The school would not be the same without [her] presence." On March 16, 2013, in honor of its 10th anniversary, the school was renamed Deanna's Montessori Children's House.

"Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10: 14). How beautifully the story of Jesus blessing the children reflects Deanna's love for her students as she "embraced them and blessed them" and put them on good, solid educational footings. "Teaching children, especially poor children, has been one of my most meaningful experiences," shared Deanna. "Children are like sponges. We give initial lessons, give them time, and then back out. Children gain a positive feeling about themselves, develop skills at a young level and they love to learn. They never lose their love for learning. The 'I can do it' attitude remains with them always . . . I believe my students taught me far more than I ever learned in school. I was always amazed to observe their readiness to learn given an environment which encouraged exploration."

Through the years, Deanna embraced several opportunities to renew her body and spirit. She had "a wonderful experience" during a semester renewal program in Jerusalem and enjoyed the Sangre Christi renewal program in Arizona, as well as a trip to the Florida Everglades. Both Deanna and Francile loved being out in nature. They would recharge with a stay at Juanita's Rocky Mountain cabin where they hiked and identified wild flowers and wildlife. In addition, they often joined a group of BVMs on an annual weekend to the Gulf of Mexico. Yet even then, their students came to mind as they walked the beach collecting seashells for their little ones. Deanna also found great pleasure in cooking, baking – especially holiday treats – and cross-stitching, possibly while reminiscing about her postulant days when she was assigned to the sewing room.

A gentle person with strong values, Deanna was committed, responsible and ever so patient. She personified charity, simplicity and humility. In her quiet way, she changed so many lives. We rejoice that, like the children in Mark's gospel, Jesus embraced Deanna, blessed her, and led her to her eternal home.