



Eulogy of Sister Marguerite Yezek, BVM (Valerian)
Marian Hall Chapel, Feb. 22, 2019

Good afternoon. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Marguerite Yezek.

Marguerite Esther Yezek was born on March 15, 1921, the first child of Albie and Elsie Chalupnik Yezek of Manly, Iowa. She was two when her sister Florence, was born. "Although we quarreled as children," Marguerite commented, "we loved each other very much."

Marguerite's mother was a pleasant, affectionate, patient, fun and yet, protective woman. Her father was very serious and extremely overworked. Despite his best efforts, farming was not productive. When Marguerite was only six months old, a tornado hit the farm, destroying everything except the farmhouse. Shortly after the barn was rebuilt, it went up in flames. When the Depression hit, the situation only worsened. An operation finally forced her father to sell the farm and find work at a gas station and as a carpenter to support his family. Very soon thereafter, his wife was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer. Marguerite was only twelve at the time. Her father lovingly cared for his wife as she was dying. He later married Mary Trainer and, in time, siblings Ronald and Sharon were born.

Reflecting upon those difficult years, Marguerite wrote, "I [was] raised in the poverty of the early 1930s, saddened by my mother's sudden death, my father's deep depression, my sister's aloneness and dependence on me . . . Mother had registered us at Holy Family School [in Mason City]. The Sisters of Charity, BVM became our new 'mothers' in a compassionate love for us . . . Almost daily we walked the seven blocks to the 7 a.m. Mass in the tiny school chapel where the silence, beauty and peace had filled my young soul. I felt at home with the sisters. By June of 1938, I thought that I'd like their life."

The Mason City BVMs quickly responded. They provided Marguerite with the proper wardrobe and assumed her financial and transportation expenses. Marguerite entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1938, and received the name Valerian upon her reception on March 19, 1939. She professed first vows on March 19, 1941, and lived 80 years as a BVM.

Of the 28 professed members of the Set of 1938, one held a very special place in Marguerite's heart. When the new postulants lined up by height to receive a community number, Paula Kelly from Boone, Iowa, followed Marguerite. They formed a close friendship that lasted 78 years, even after Paula left the community in 1968, and until her death in 2016. Paula called Marguerite her "one-in-a-million friend."

Marguerite ministered in education for 44 years. She was an elementary teacher at St. Anthony in Davenport, Iowa; Sacred Heart in Rock Island, Ill.; and St. Mary in Iowa City, Iowa. She taught high school math and English at St. Augustine in Memphis, Tenn.; Our Lady of Peace in St. Paul, Minn.; Assumption in Davenport, Iowa; and Carmel in Mundelein, Ill. She was the ultimate professional, the essence of refinement and expected no less of her students. In her autobiography she wrote, "I *loved* teaching, challenging students, rejoicing with their growth in self-esteem, confidence, and accomplishments."

Marguerite's students responded to her love. One wrote, "Your stories are not only informative; they're fun to listen to! Sister, I can't thank you enough for all your time and effort, and for a really fun year. Not only are you a super teacher, you're a terrific person." Another remarked, "Sister Marguerite was the best teacher I ever had. I transferred to Carmel as a sophomore from Argentina and it was a very difficult transition for me, but with her encouragement I eventually found my way. I went on to earn my B.S. and M.S. in communication disorders. Thank you . . . for sharing your love of language." A third student added, "I hope that everyone at one time in their life has a teacher like you. You didn't just teach your subject . . . I can honestly say you've taught me about life."

Marguerite semi-retired in 1985. Along with tutoring math and English, she volunteered with the Ministry of Care elderly program at St. Peter Parish in Skokie, Ill. She also trained and coordinated the lectors and Communion ministers. "To be happy, I have always known that I must serve and I still want to serve as long as I am able. Early retirement has been rich in new experiences, especially in the freedom to travel a bit, to take leisure in prayer, to relax in meeting the daily tasks, and to be involved again in the parish after many years away from it."

Painting was one of Marguerite's favorite leisure activities. A number of her paintings are on display near the chapel entrance. With her "freedom to travel," Marguerite and Paula enjoyed several road trips to the western United States and Canada and excursions to Hawaii, Costa Rica and Switzerland before deciding that, at ages 87 and 88, it was time to be "satisfied taking care of ourselves."

Nonetheless, Marguerite struggled with giving up activities as her health declined. She was always very independent. Eventually, she found happiness in the quieter state of religious life and purpose in prayer ministry. "I have grown in deeper appreciation of my loving God and my BVMs . . . Our explicit trust in Him lightens our own limitations.

Marguerite exemplified faith and service. She spent her religious life at two ends of the spectrum: shaping young minds to prepare future leaders and companioning the elderly in the final stages of life. St. Paul wrote, "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good steward of God's varied grace." Marguerite used her gift well. May she know peace and joy beyond all imagination, reunited with her parents, her sisters and her dear friend Paula, in the loving presence of God.