



Eulogy of Sister Gertrude Ann Sullivan, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, March 18, 2019

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Gertrude Ann Sullivan.

Ethel Mary Sullivan was born Sept. 14, 1929, the only child of William and Gertrude Byrne Sullivan from Milwaukee, Wis. Her mother, who had had several miscarriages, had been sent to bed for the duration of the pregnancy. Originally, her parents had selected the name Mary Ann for a baby girl, but chose Ethel Mary when Mrs. Sullivan's only sister died suddenly from appendicitis.

When Ethel was only 20 months old, tragedy struck the Sullivan family right in their own home. A rejected suitor murdered the Sullivan nanny and Ethel's father while Ethel's mother was putting her to bed upstairs. Despite her young age, she retained one memory of her father. "[I remember] riding in the front seat with my tall Dad next to me. I remember sitting in the old fashioned car seat facing the dashboard with my chubby legs dangling out of the holes." A few weeks after her father's death, Minnie Orthmann became Ethel's new nanny. Although an authoritarian, Minnie won a spot in the hearts of Ethel and her mother and the three became a family.

Ethel graduated from Holy Angels Academy in Milwaukee and completed one year at Rosary College in River Forest, Ill., before entering the congregation on Sept. 8, 1948. She received the name Gertrude Ann upon her reception on March 19, 1949. While a second year novice, her mother became seriously ill. Because she was an only child, she was able to spend a week with her mother before she died. Gertrude Ann professed her first vows on March 19, 1951, and lived 70 years as a BVM.

Gertrude Ann, affectionately known as Gert, was a creative and organized teacher who taught fourth, seventh, and eighth grades for twenty years. She was missioned at St. Patrick and St. Anthony in Dubuque, Iowa, and St. Thomas the Apostle in West Hempstead, N.Y., where she developed a modular schedule that turned seventh and eighth grade into a real junior high. Gert served on the BVM Elementary Education Commission and as the Director of Education for Resurrection School in Scottsdale, Ariz. She worked as a graduate assistant at the Bureau for Educational Research while completing her doctoral degree in higher education administration at Arizona State University. Afterward, she accepted a position as the Curriculum Director for the Diocese of San Diego in 1977 and later worked as a National Curriculum Consultant at Hesa, Inc.

Gert gained national recognition as an educational consultant and software developer. She authored several books on self-evaluation for teachers and principals as well as *The Padre Junipero Serra Trilogy*, originally funded by the California Catholic Conference in 1984 and reprinted by the Serra Club of Dubuque in 2006. She gave teacher workshops all over the country, spreading her message: "You have one of the most important tasks on this planet. You have received the call to be teachers. The children sitting in our classrooms hold the future of our planet in their hands. And we, the teachers, have the potential, if we use it, to impact and transform not just the microcosm of a classroom here and there, but also the entire microcosm of the global community." In 1990, Gert was inducted into the Hall of Fame at her alma mater St. Robert's Grade School in Shorewood, Wis.

Gert served as an associate professor in the education department at Clarke College and later as Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs until suffering a stroke, which affected her memory. After spending a year at a

monastery in Arizona, she embraced the opportunity to be the assistant principal at a new Catholic school, Serra Catholic Elementary in Orange County, Calif., where she established and directed the learning center. After a series of major health issues, Gert retired and moved to Dubuque in 2002 and to Mount Carmel in 2003.

Gert was a gifted artist who discovered her talent late in life when the students at Serra School gave her a partial tuition grant to the Renaissance School of Art. Her favorite medium was watercolor because she loved the colors. In recent years, she experimented with digital painting thus bringing together computers and art as she had done with computers and education when she computerized diocesan elementary curriculum. Many of her works decorate the halls here at Mount Carmel.

Gert was very intelligent and a perfectionist who gave her all to the work at hand. However, we remember her best as a quiet, humble and grateful woman. As expressed in her final wishes, she wanted all of us to know she never forgot nor ceased loving us and she will always be grateful to everyone with whom she lived and worked, studied and taught.

Gert often recalled a saying from a wall hanging in her childhood bedroom.

Life is a game of ups and downs.
She takes the best who never frowns.
Who takes the see-saw with a smile
will find the passing days worthwhile.

Gert's life was filled with "ups and downs" – a dichotomy of themes: tragic loss and wonder-filled joy, solitude and intimacy, deep faith and serious doubting. The desire to embrace whatever God asked of her was the thread that held life together. Like St. Paul, Gert "put [her] trust and hope in Christ alone" (Phil. 3:7), always finding a way to discover a positive, even in the greatest struggle.

Gert often commented, "Whenever a change in my life was to occur I was brought back to [the Mississippi] River. And here I wait for my next step in the journey." Last Monday, her wait was over. "My beloved speaks and says to me: 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away'" (Song of Songs 2:10). We celebrate and rejoice for Gert. She has returned to her heavenly home where only peace, joy and love exist.