



Eulogy of Sister Teresita Poulin, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, April 23, 2019

Good morning and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Teresita Poulin.

Winifred (Winnie) Cecilia Poulin was born on June 28, 1931, the third of six children, four girls and two boys, born to Wilfred and Amy Lively Poulin of Heath, Mass. She joined siblings Davina and Levi with Claudia, Ronald and Mabel later completing the family. Her parents were of French-Canadian descent and the family spoke French in their home. Her father was a carpenter and her mother was one of twelve children and loved the outdoors. Together they purchased and operated a farm with a sawmill. They spent a few years in New Hampshire where they lost their youngest son Ronald in an accident. To celebrate twenty years of marriage, Winnie's parents decided to travel to California on a second honeymoon and fell in love with the state. The couple packed up two cars, a trailer, twelve people from three families, a cat and a dog, and headed to San Jose, Calif., in 1947.

Winnie knew she wanted to be a religious sister from the time she was seven years old when a cousin wearing her postulant uniform visited the Poulin family. She loved the uniform so much that her mother made her a little habit and her future was sealed. She completed her junior and senior years at Notre Dame High School in San Jose where one of her teachers was a BVM who encouraged her to join the Sisters of Charity. Winnie entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1949, and received the name Teresita upon her reception on March 19, 1950. She was very happy to lose her nickname Winnie the Pooh! She professed her first vows on March 19, 1952 and lived 67 years as a BVM.

Teresita taught elementary grades in California at St. Philip in Pasadena and Our Lady of Lourdes in Tujunga, before serving as superior at Holy Redeemer in Montrose. She served five years on the congregational Elementary Education Commission traveling much of the country to instruct teachers on improved teaching methods. Teresita returned to the classroom at St. Thomas in Memphis, Tenn., and later brought a preschool to life in an abandoned parish in Kansas City, Mo as the director of Bishop Helmsing Early Childhood Center.

Teresita was instrumental in opening the Roberta Kuhn Center in 1981 and served as its first director. She knew that most Dubuquers had never stepped foot onto the grounds of Mount Carmel and wanted people to enjoy its beauty as well as the classes. She even convinced the City of Dubuque to add a bus stop at Mount Carmel to serve the "students" without cars.

In 1983, at the invitation of the bishop of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, Teresita became the Catholic Charities Director of Housing and was tasked with building low-income senior housing, the Vigil Light Apartments, in a former walnut orchard. Twenty years later, again upon request, she took management of these same apartments.

She served for six years as a regional representative. In 1991, Teresita became the director of the Catholic Charities Family Support Center, an emergency shelter for homeless mothers with children. In 2001, the Sister Teresita Children's Center, a licensed daycare for homeless children, was dedicated in a wing of the Family Support Center.

On her own initiative, Teresita created a program that accepted donations of old mobile homes, restored them and gave them to homeless families, along with lessons on how to manage personal finances. These families would then invest sweat equity to prepare a mobile home for another homeless family. Today, twenty-five years later, the mobile home project continues to grow.

For twenty years, Teresita served people in need in Sonoma County, helping them to work their way out of poverty and homelessness. Many of her “clienteles” were immigrants. She labored tirelessly to assist them at every step along the path to citizenship, even learning Spanish to serve them better. “My heart went out to those people who suffered so much and had to overcome so many obstacles,” she shared. “It [made] me feel very, very happy and gratified that I was able to help [them] take that big step toward opening their whole future.”

For relaxation and enjoyment, Teresita loved working in her flowerbeds and garden. She began composting when BVM sisters were encouraged to connect creatively with the earth in preparation for the new millennium. As a result, she had a wonderfully productive garden and gladly shared her organic produce with friends and the needy. During her 2002 sabbatical at the Ursuline Convent in Santa Rosa, she noticed that the flowerbeds and their very large garden were in disrepair. Since her sabbatical coincided with the 200th birthday of Mary Frances Clarke, Teresita’s gift to Mother Clarke was to provide the tender loving care needed to revive the beauty of the grounds. She removed or pruned old plants and bushes, planted new ones, cleaned statues, repaired and painted ornamental bridges in the Japanese tea garden and the lawn furniture on the patio, and even re-laid stones on the walking paths.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Here is my servant whom I strengthen, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; one who will bring justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1). At the core of Teresita’s being was a desire for justice. To enable her work, she was blessed with many talents – a talent for making things happen, a talent for creativeness in frugality, a talent for helping others discover their talents. Yet, she had one solitary goal. “My goal as a woman and as a religious,” she wrote, “is to be a catalyst for ‘miracles’ to happen. Making a difference in the lives of those in need is a great motivating force in my life. As a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I have had the opportunity to minister in many different parts of the country and in a variety of works. I feel very blessed to have had these experiences and to be able to share the gift of myself with others.”

Teresita, thank you for generously giving of yourself, for being a great blessing in the lives of all who have known you. With love and gratitude, we send you off to rest from your labors. We look forward to the day when we shall meet again.