



Eulogy of Sister Marie, BVM (Charles Marie)

Marian Hall Chapel, Nov. 21, 2019

Welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Marie Neff. It is good to be here with you.

Delphia Louise Neff was born in Kansas City, Mo., on June 11, 1929, to Charles and Mary Delphia Riley Neff of Shawnee, Mo. She legally changed her name to Marie in 2006. Marie was the fourth of seven children. She joined Mary Ellen, Charles, and John and was followed by Catherine, Margaret, and Helen.

When Marie was just seven years old, she told her cousin, a Jesuit priest, that she was going to be sister. Marie was introduced to the BVMs when her family moved to Kansas City where she attended St. Aloysius High School. The family moved back to Shawnee one year later because her mother couldn't stand the noise of the city. Although she graduated from St. Joseph High School, a Benedictine school, her BVM teachers at St. Aloysius, especially Sister Mary Ann Michele Shay, left an indelible impression. Marie entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1946, received the name Charles Marie upon her reception on March 19, 1947, and professed first vows on March 19, 1949.

Marie taught middle and upper elementary grades for 23 years. She was missioned in California at St. Paul in San Francisco and St. Vincent in Petaluma; in Nebraska at St. Bridget in Omaha and Sacred Heart in Lincoln; in Missouri at St. Catherine in Hickman Mills and both St. Catherine and St. Regis in Kansas City; and in Kansas at St. Thomas Aquinas in Wichita.

She served as principal at St. Regis for 13 of 38 total years ministering at that school. Marie had a great love for the children. "I really never wanted to go off and do something else," she commented. "I've always loved teaching."

Marie was an avid sports fan whose memorabilia from the Kansas City Royals, the Kansas City Chiefs, and the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame decorated her classroom. She thought of each teaching day as "a whole new ball game."

While there were many changes in Marie's classroom through the years, prayer remained a constant. "I think prayer is very important," she said. "[It helps children] be peaceful within themselves." Inclusion was also important to Marie. If she saw a student standing on the sidelines during recess, she took action to include them in the event, even if it meant teaching them how to play the game herself.

A St. Regis teacher praised Marie saying, "As a teacher, Sister Marie . . . taught with expectations and high standards, but she made it fun. [As a principal], she allowed teachers to explore their talents [and] be creative in the classroom. . . . Her greatest strength was her love and acceptance for students as well as teachers and parents. She [had] that ability to provide an environment where people wanted to be and stay. She was so secure within herself she allowed people to blossom."

A former student nominated Marie as an outstanding teacher for *Who's Who Among America's Teachers* in 1998. In addition, the St. Regis Athletic Association created the Sister Marie Neff Academic/Athletic Scholarship for O'Hara High School to be awarded to an eighth grade girl at St. Regis.

For Marie's 60th Jubilee in 2006, the pastor of St. Regis wrote: "Sister Marie has been a real blessing to the St. Regis community over the years and continues to be an active presence in the school and the parish. Sister Marie still finds the time and energy to serve as a substitute teacher in our school and children continue to be blessed by her loving way. She is also one of the few people . . . who will stay up late through extra innings to cheer on her beloved Royals and still make it to daily Mass. Many thanks to Sister Marie for her years of dedication and service."

Marie's greatest dream as a Kansas City Royals fan came true on June 30, 1999, when she threw out the ceremonial first pitch at a Royals game against the Chicago White Sox. She brought her own glove and was decked out in Royals apparel – all gifts from former students. Marie had only two days to get her pitching arm ready, but like all good teachers and pitchers, she found time to practice. Of course, learning baseball from her father, a plumber who played semi-pro ball in a union league, and playing ball with her students helped. In case you are wondering, she threw a strike.

Marie moved to Mount Carmel in 2011, but refused to refer to herself as "retired." She preferred "recycled." Her volunteer activities included being a member of the Sisters Development Network. She treasured the bonds she formed with donors. "I hear about celebrations, new grandchildren, weddings, anniversaries, special trips, request for prayers, and sad times in their lives like illness or the death of a loved one. They are especially grateful knowing that they are prayed for daily."

St Paul wrote, "Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him" (Colossians 3:17). This is the way Marie lived. Her words were open and honest; her deeds thoughtful, kind, and loving. She had a sense of humor and enjoyed life. She was a good listener who could anticipate the needs of others. She was generous with her time and a hard worker – the first person people sought out when something needed to be done. She was grateful for all that people did for her, but even more grateful to have the opportunity to serve others.

Marie lived 73 years as a BVM. "I've never regretted it," she shared. "It's been a wonderful life."

With deep gratitude and great joy, we say farewell to Marie knowing that she is enjoying a new "wonderful life" beyond her wildest imagination.