

**Eulogy of Sister Ernestina Molinari, BVM**  
Marian Hall Chapel, Jan. 13, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Ernestina Molinari.

Elvira (pronounced el-VEER-a) Emily Molinari entered this world on Oct. 30, 1930, in San Francisco, as the first child of Ernest and Ernestine Bardini Molinari, both Italian immigrants. Her brother Roy John completed the family. Her mother was extroverted, generous, and full of common sense advice for all in the neighborhood. Her father, a window washer, was a quiet man with a good sense of humor who enjoyed listening to her mother and pretty much did whatever she said. They were best friends. With her father being one of nine children and her mother one of 15, Elvira grew up surrounded by cousins.

The Molinari family lived across the street from St. Philip ES, where her mother worked and Elvira attended for several years. She completed her elementary and secondary education at St. Paul.

Elvira entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1948, much to the delight of her mother. Her father, on the other hand, was not so pleased. For years, he continued to tell her that the door was open if she ever wanted to come home. Regardless of the mixed reaction, her parents, for as long as they could, visited her every year, even in Hawaii. Elvira received the name Ernestina upon her reception on March 19, 1949, professed first vows on March 19, 1951, and lived 71 years as a BVM.

Ernestina spent 23 years in elementary education. She taught in California at St. Bernard in Los Angeles, St. Gertrude and Presentation in Stockton, and St. Paul High School in San Francisco. She also taught at Annunciation and Our Lady of Lourdes in Chicago, and at St. Catherine and Holy Cross in Kauai, Hawaii. She served as principal at St. Brigid and St. Thomas More in San Francisco. Ernestina loved teaching, with her missions in Hawaii among her favorites. However, her time as principal was marked with difficult moments. The lowest was the 1970 "closing" of St. Brigid, the oldest BVM school in California, when on the day she presented the faculty contracts for the coming year, the pastor said the BVMs were no longer needed.

Ernestina served the congregation as chairperson for the Elementary Education Commission and administrator of Guadalupe College in Los Gatos, Calif., when it served as a BVM retirement facility. Even though she was known as "the boss" and kept her "worker bee" sisters busy at Guadalupe, she was well liked for generously allowing and encouraging them to have fun getting to know her home state. Sadly, once again she was tasked with closing the site after moving the retired sisters to new their locations.

Afterwards, Ernestina taught for adult education programs in San Jose and Santa Clara California. She also worked as the manager for Vigil Lights Apartments, a low-income housing complex for the elderly and disabled sponsored by the Diocese of Santa Rosa. A letter from the Bishop of Santa Rosa expressed his gratitude to Ernestina, as well as to other BVMs who ministered at Vigil Lights. "All of them brought their gifts in assisting the elderly and disabled residents and were most generous in sharing their time, talent, and above all their faith and love with them. [The Diocese] will be forever grateful. . . ."

Ernestina enjoyed living in close proximity to her family in California. Frequently the family spent weekends going up to the river, especially when our deceased Sister Elaine Wojcik, Ernestina's dear close friend for over 60 years, came to visit. Elaine and Ernestina would go to the river to work on their tans. They also enjoyed driving to Las Vegas to play the five and ten cent slots. Purportedly, they were talented at earning enough points through a loyalty rewards program for a free stay at the hotel.

Ernestina lived in the San Francisco area after retiring until failing eyesight brought her to Mount Carmel in 2001. She actively volunteered and participated in activities as her sight allowed. With the help of handheld reading

devices, she continued to enjoy reading history and staying on top of political news. Ernestina also loved opera, museums, and art galleries. She especially enjoyed the art of Ettore DeGrazia, known for his colorful images of Native American children, and had a collection of his prints in her room.

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Luke 12:34). Ernestina's treasure, and perhaps her favorite "hobby," was connecting with people. With that famous effusive Italian personality—large, vibrant, alive—she was energy and joy personified. She not only enjoyed a good party, she made it a good party, lighting up a room with her effervescence. She totally engaged with people, making conversations with her easy and comfortable. Ernestina was always true to herself, even when she bubbled up outside conventional lines. She truly knew the meaning of "being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God's steadfast love."

In Ernestina's self-composed eulogy, she wrote, "You will by now be sharing stories of me and how you saw me. Here's how I see myself." She went on to share the characteristics she inherited from her parents and grandparents. From her Nonno Bardini, "a dash of partying and a pinch of procrastination." From her Nonna Bardini, "a pound of firmness, determination, discipline, organization, and a ton of love of traveling." From both, "an appreciation and love of music. Singing and dancing were always part of family gatherings." From Nonno Molinari, "perfectionism that at times caused stress and pain in my life." From Nonna Molinari, "the need to get the work done first and then play." From both, "enjoying card playing and games." From her parents, "love of God, following Jesus, devotion to Mary." From both ancestral sides, "a gene which produced love of family and of friends. For this I am most grateful. You have been a blessing in my life on earth and I look forward to our reunion in heaven."

"As this is being read to you," Ernestina wrote, "I am enjoying a glorious reunion with my loving Creator and [my] wonderful parents." Surely, it's a splendid celebration with Ernestina as the life of the party. Thank you, Ernestina, for all the joy you brought to our lives.