



Eulogy of Sister Donard Collins, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, April 26, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Donard Collins.

Charlotte Rose Collins was born in Marcus, Iowa, on Sept. 23, 1931, to William and Anna Laurena Ryan Collins. Charlotte's mother named her after SM Jarlath Fitzgibbons, BVM who was the dearly loved convent cook. "My mother misunderstood her name and called me Charlotte," she shared. "I was baptized immediately because I had pneumonia and the doctor did not expect me to live." Charlotte was the second youngest of 11 living children. She joined brothers Leonard, Donald, and Patrick and sisters Eileen, Mary, Lilian, Viola, Betty, and LaVonne, with younger sister Lorraine completing the family.

Charlotte's parents were farmers until moving to town when she was 7. When she was an eighth grader at Holy Name, the vocation director from the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) in LaCrosse, Wis., spoke to her class. "Since they were from St. Rose Convent, [my middle name], I was sure that that was a sign that I should be a Franciscan. When my mother discovered the application . . . she let me know that I was not ready to go to *any* convent."

After graduating from Holy Name High School, Charlotte entered the BVM congregation on Sept. 8, 1949. She received the name Donard—a combination of her brothers' names, Donald and Leonard—upon her reception on March 19, 1950. "When we could return to our baptismal names, I chose to keep Donard," she wrote. "Don was so proud that I was named after him. Leonard suffered from mental problems and I did not want to hurt him. [Besides,] Charlotte was not my favorite name and I preferred not to be called Sister Charlie or Chuck." Donard professed first vows on March 19, 1952, and lived 70 years as a BVM.

Donard's first mission was as an elementary teacher to St. Eugene in Chicago. "I also had the experience there of teaching music," she shared. "As most know, I am definitely not musically inclined. I recall telling one of my students who asked me to play a song for her from the third grade Thompson book. Since I had not gotten that far in the Thompson series, I told her that I did not want her to copy my style."

Donard was also missioned as an elementary teacher at Holy Cross and Blessed Sacrament in Chicago; St. Augustine in Memphis, Tenn.; Immaculate Conception in Clarksdale, Miss.; St. Pius in Mountlake Terrace, Wash.; and Christ the King and St. John in Seattle.

In 1971, when her mother was quite ill, Donard decided that instead of working that summer at Marian Hall as a nurse's aide, she would go home and care for her mother. "My mother was emphatic in her response: 'You have your own family to take care of!' I always appreciated that Mom knew that my BVM family was truly my family as my nieces and nephews were my sisters' families."

To better serve her BVM family, Donard trained as a licensed practical nurse (LPN) and ministered as a nurse and a nursing supervisor at Marian Hall. She handled all situations with great sensitivity, expertise, and patience, without putting up with nonsense.

Although she became very attached to the sisters at Marian Hall during her six years there, she accepted a teaching position at Epiphany ES in Sioux City, Iowa, to be closer to her mother, who was now in her mid-80s. It was fortuitous. While she had wonderful years teaching various grades, she experienced tremendous loss in her life. In four years, Donard lost her brothers Donald, Leonard, and Pat, her sister Mary, a brother-in-law, her dear mother, and she, herself, had surgery for cancer. "These losses were hard because we are a close-knit family," she shared. "I have always said that it was [because of] the support of the local BVM community that I was able to survive."

Donard returned to congregational service first as a regional representative and then as Motherhouse administrator. "The greatest gift I received during [my time as regional] was getting to know such beautiful sisters," she shared. "It truly was a blessing [and] an opportunity to appreciate and deepen my love for our congregation." As Motherhouse administrator, Donard got right to work. If something needed to be done, she saw that it was done immediately. Yet, the relationships she formed meant the most and touched her deeply. She called this time "beautiful years" and "an opportunity to explore firsthand the ability to grow old gracefully."

After retiring, Donard volunteered at Mount Carmel, served as a member of the Sisters Development Network, and, as Jesus with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, walked with our sisters during their most troubling moments. Ever so generous, compassionate, and loving, she visited the sick and homebound and went the extra mile for a sister who needed a companion with medical skills, even traveling half-way across the country. She could ease burdens simply by her presence and had a gift for bringing out the best in others. Like the disciples in Luke's Gospel, we who are blessed to have known Donard could also exclaim, "Were not our hearts burning within us while [she] spoke to us on the way?" (Luke 24:32).

Donard had a zest for life. She enjoyed telling stories of her mission experiences and sharing a laugh or two. Besides reading, she loved to crochet and made beautiful baby sets and blankets for her many nieces and nephews. And who could forget her gift of dance? What a beautiful expression of her joyful spirit!

The words from the closing song at her committal service also beautifully express the way Donard lived her earthly life and her hope of everlasting life.

*"'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
and when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'twill be in the valley of love and delight."*

Close your eyes. Do you see her dancing?