



**Eulogy of Sister Dolores Marie McHugh, BVM**  
Marian Hall Chapel, April 30, 2020

Good morning to each of you gathered in one mind and heart here at Mount Carmel and across the country as we celebrate the faith-full, joyous life of our dear Dolores Marie McHugh, BVM.

Sarah Agnes McHugh, always called Sally, was born April 24, 1933, in Ambridge, Pa., to Michael and Mary Abbey McHugh. She was the middle child of seven, preceded by Patricia, Margaret and John, and followed by Eileen, Frank and Dolores.

Her father was a native of County Donegal, Ireland. His sister entered the Mercy community there, became an outstanding educator and mother general. Sally's mother came from Pittsburgh, and the McHughes opened a tiny grocery store in the small community of Allegheny Acres, not far from the city. Sally recalled them having three acres of strawberries and raspberries, and picking wild berries as well. When she was in eighth grade the family moved to Phoenix.

Sally wrote in her autobiography that she had an initial desire for religious life early in elementary school, and the stories her dad told of his Mercy sister added to the attraction. When she was 15, her 21-year-old sister Margaret died shortly after giving birth to her first child. The unexpected death was a huge jolt. "Is life that short? Am I giving my best?" Sally asked herself. The outreach of the BVMs at St. Matthew's, where her younger siblings attended school, made a deep impression, and she decided to enter the BVMs. They had what she wanted: "calmness, happiness, peace."

So at age 16, before completing high school, Sally became the youngest member of the Set of 1949. Her mother predicted she would be home in two weeks. Welcoming her to Mount Carmel was postulant mistress Sister—later Mother—Mary Consolatrice. "She was gentle but firm," Sally later recalled. "As she glided down the hall, I had a sense of 'all will be well.' She always challenged me to grow, expressed confidence in what I thought I could not do and she affirmed me not only through initial formation but also at various key points along life's journey."

Sally was received on March 19, 1950, and received the name Dolores Marie after her younger sister. She professed first vows on March 19, 1952, and was missioned at Presentation School in Chicago to teach kindergarten: 60 children in the morning, and another 60 in the afternoon. She was not quite 19 years old. Dolores managed through "youthful exuberance and the grace of God," and with a determination that the children "would have to be independent. I was not going to tie shoes."

After 3½ years she began a 10-year stint in southern California at Incarnation and Holy Family in Glendale. In 1965 she was sent to St. Catherine's School in Kansas City, Mo., as teacher and then principal. When the pastor blocked her reappointment as principal, all the BVMs on the faculty resigned.

She moved to Des Moines and served as curriculum coordinator and superintendent of schools for the diocese from 1976-84. She was the only woman superintendent among the four Catholic dioceses. Her passion for Catholic education, her work ethic—110% all the time—her honesty, and ability to build relationships made a mark. "She loved us into doing things we never thought we wanted to do or could do," said a long-time friend and

colleague. These years also graced Dolores with a dynamic, supportive intercongregational living community and a Vatican II-centered diocesan leadership that was pastoral and prophetic.

The congregation elected Dolores first vice president in 1984 and 1988, and president in 1992 and 1996. Dolores brought her love of God, passion for religious life, intense love for each sister, compassion, and caring. She affirmed people and empowered them to become their best selves. "She was most happy in a crowd of people," recalled a friend. An outstanding administrator with boundless enthusiasm, her sense of humor helped keep life in perspective. Her laughter was infectious, and she relished a party, complete with music and dancing. Family was important, and she had a strong, individual relationship with each person.

During her tenure, Mission and Ministry Reflection Weekends and Spirituality Weekends took place around the country, and ministry sites were launched. The Associate program received its first full-time coordinator. Housing for BVM Sisters became a critical need. This led to construction of the housing units in Carmel Circle in 1997, and the building of Caritas Center, completed in 1999

Dolores was in Rome with the team when the BVM *Constitutions* were formally approved in 1989; these were a bedrock of her spirituality. She served on the Clarke University Board for more than two decades, on the Carmel High School Board when the decision was made to become co-ed rather than co-institutional, and on the Mundelein College Board during negotiations with Loyola University. She initiated contact in difficult situations, firmly believed in a team approach and utilized consultation effectively to reach a resolution. "Her attention to detail drove me crazy," acknowledged a friend who served on a board with her, "but I trusted her insights and wisdom, foresight, and courage."

Dolores' conviction that women religious can make a communal difference in the world was shared in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, where she chaired Region X and was a national board member. The leaders respected her clarity, organization, and capacity to relate while simultaneously enjoying life and celebrating.

Whether mowing the sizeable lawn at her home on Laurel Street in Dubuque, grilling hamburgers for friends, avidly following the news and its implications for BVM mission, playing with Jett, the dog next door, or creating a home with her long-time faithful friend, Jean Gordon, Dolores was totally engaged and vibrant.

After a year's sabbatical in 2000-2001, which included trips to the Holy Land and El Salvador, she became coordinator of pastoral care at Mount Carmel for six years. "I am at a different space in my life and in my faith journey as a BVM," she wrote. "I have learned," she added, "how poverty is very much associated with the aging process . . . of letting go, letting go, and letting go."

The aging process took its toll on Dolores, rendering her unable to articulate her ideas and feelings. Yet she never lost her spirit. Years ago, friends abbreviated her name to McHug. That became even more visible when, as a Mount Carmel resident, she reached out to touch all she encountered. Her eyes continued to speak with joy, gratitude, at times frustration, and always love. Her actions were of outreach and drawing others into the community of Caritas 4.

The Scripture passage which spoke most directly to Dolores and which she lived deeply, is from the prophet Micah: "This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this, to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God."

She described what this meant in her Senate reflection in 1996: "Love calls us to confront the truth, to challenge one another, to listen to one another. The call to love tenderly is to love gently in a manner not to injure or cause pain. Love teaches us to forgive without limits. Each time we choose to love another we are sharing in the heart of God. God's love empowers us to love. It is God's immeasurable love which brings life to the world and which sustains our lives. It is this steadfast love which God wants us to know. This love is manifested in practical,

personal ways in our lives: in our human relationships, in words of encouragement, in times of peace and harmony, in warm greetings with a hug and/or a kiss . . . .”

Dolores continued, “The love we desire, the love we wish to share, necessitates an ongoing deepening of our contemplative spirit where we find God at the very center of our being, where we experience our oneness with God and our communion with one another.”

This is the life Dolores lived, immersed in the presence of a God whom she knew loved her, and who suddenly last Friday called her to turn that daily walk into a run and dance of union—a birthday banquet unlike any other of the communion of saints in her life.

Dolores has invited us to follow that same path, and shown us the way. We dance in gratitude for the gift of her fidelity, all-encompassing love and, for the moment, virtual hugs!

*Eulogy was composed by Sister Mira Mosle, BVM.*