



Eulogy of Sister Dorothy (Agnes Cecile) Feehan, BVM

Marian Hall, June 19, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Dorothy Feehan.

Dorothy (Dot) Ann Feehan entered this world on Feb. 15, 1927, as the daughter of James and Irene (Davy) Feehan of Oak Park, Ill. She joined older siblings Mary Margaret, Cecile, and Irene. Her father died when she was but four years old, so her family moved in with an aunt and uncle and her mother went to work outside the home. A cousin, Thomas Davy, also lived in the Feehan/Davy household and became the brother she never had.

From her early childhood, Dot was always known by her twinkling eyes and merry smile that were clearly inherited from her Irish roots. Her presence lit up any room, so it is little wonder that she lived up to her name, which in Irish circles meant "gift of God."

Dot presented herself as a gift to God when she entered the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Congregation on Feb. 2, 1945. She received the name Agnes Cecile upon her reception on Aug. 15, 1945, and professed her first vows on Aug. 15, 1947. She lived 75 years as a BVM.

Dot taught elementary grades at St. Charles in Chicago; St. Joseph in Sioux City, Iowa; Corpus Christi in Fort Dodge, Iowa; and St. Anthony in Missoula, Mont., where she also served as principal. It was during her time in elementary education that Dot completed a bachelor's degree in history from Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa; and subsequently, a master's degree in education with a minor in psychology from Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee. She then served as an instructor in the education department at Clarke University for two years before serving six years as regional representative.

As one of those first regional representatives who were called to serve during a tumultuous time with so many changes and departures of BVMs, Dot was a calming presence of listening and understanding as she moved among the sisters in Northern California and the Northwest. Marie Corr remembers her as a living model of "being freed and helping others to be free in God's steadfast love," and one who was immersed in the vision of Vatican II that was moving BVMs to embrace new forms of authority, leadership, relationships, and ministries. Marie recounted that Dot modeled those new forms in the way she enabled Region 2 members to gather and to relate to one another.

Dot ministered as director of religious education at St. Anne Parish in Arvada, Colo., and was on staff at the Ministry Training Services at Loretto Heights College in Littleton, Colo. She returned to parish work as a pastoral minister at Spirit of Peace Catholic Community in Longmont, Colo., where she ministered for 18 years. Spirit of Peace was unusual in that it was comprised of small communities of about a dozen families that met in each other's homes about twice a month but together celebrated weekend Masses

held at the Presbyterian Church. A friend of Dot's remarked, "She was the heart of the pastoral team at Spirit of Peace and the people really loved her. Their team and parish were a model in the archdiocese."

A friend recalls that "one of the things I loved most about Dot was that she didn't interrupt. I never felt like she's waiting for a call from the pope or on her way to lunch with the Dalai Lama and can only give me four or five seconds of her time. She listened!" Another friend commented, "I learned so much from her and have unending affection and admiration for how loving, wise, and inclusive she always has been and was to the end."

One highlight in Dot's life was the opportunity to spend a week on retreat at the monastery in Taizé, France, in August 1989. For Dot, part of the wonder was the bonding that occurred in the midst of the multilingual, multicultural, and interdenominational group of people. "No one spoke the same language, but we all communicated," she commented. "The bonding occurred in prayer, when all were one. I sensed both great pain and a real awareness of God."

Driven by an invitation from the Catholic Worker House in Denver, Dot began to direct retreats at the Colorado Retreat Center for the homeless and disadvantaged. "This experience was filled with special sacredness," wrote Dot. "Living without financial security made these men and women know the path of abandonment and dependence on God in a profound way. Throughout the weekend they revealed stories of trust and faith; I was greatly changed and graced by God."

Some remember Dot as a "convener." Whether joining her BVM friends and associates for a day of skiing on the Colorado slopes, gathering for a cluster meeting, or their annual trip to Glacier Lodge in Estes Park, she was always bringing people together. While the cluster met regularly, each year as Mother's Day rolled around, Dot would issue a special invitation to cluster members to join her for a lovely meal at which time they would remember and honor their mothers. She was always welcoming.

In 2000, Dot retired from full-time ministry and moved to Missoula, Mont., where she continued her personal ministry in many small faith communities. There she continued to provide spiritual direction and retreats. In an interview, she talked about the mystery present in the spiritual director's role. "[Everyone comes with] rich and deep spiritual experiences. You listen with the realization that you are standing on the holy ground of people's lives . . . [It's essential] to understand each person from the background that has been God's way of leading them." One of her Missoula friends wrote an essay about Dot trying to describe the unique woman she was. She described Dot as "a tall, gracefully slim woman with deliciously blue aquamarine eyes and hands that appear wide and deep enough to hold all the world's troubles."

Dot's friend, Jim Hogan, wrote of her, "During her 75 years as a BVM, she was a sister in the deepest, truest sense of the word, to hundreds of people in communities from Chicago to the Islands of Hawaii. Older women, young women, and men of various ages related to her as sister. In teaching, counseling, hiking, skiing, swimming, or sharing a meal, people enjoyed her laughter, her wit, her profound wisdom, and her non-judgmental acceptance . . . In her own way she was a woman of Eucharist. She broke and shared the life of Christ with us in so many ways."

Dot moved to Mount Carmel in 2012. At her farewell celebration in Missoula, the BVM cluster there described her as a "mentor and model of the Risen Christ in our midst. Ever gentle, always unconditionally loving . . . A woman of wisdom who shared graciously with all of us." A message posted

on the Solidarity with Sisters website reads, “[Dot had] grit and grace and compassion and diplomacy She [created] community wherever she [was] by skillfully and gracefully inviting people into an environment of welcome, openness, inquiry, and blessing.”

Dot became a servant of the Church, called by God, to preach by her every action the Word of God. She was a woman of faith who lived with confidence that the Gracious Mystery we name God draws us to become more fully human and alive. Always looking forward to sharing God’s glory, she lived with the conviction that Christ is risen! Now like Christ, our Sister Dot Feehan is risen, she has gone before us to the welcoming arms of God.