



Eulogy of Sister Dolores M. Kramer, BVM (Jeanne Michele)
Caritas Studio, July 31, 2020

Good morning and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Dolores M. Kramer.

Dolores Marie Kramer entered this world on Aug. 20, 1928, the first of four children born to Charles and Marguerite (Keniry) Kramer of Alta Vista, Iowa. Siblings Patrick, Joan Margaret, and Mary Lois completed the family. Her mother was a country school teacher. After her parents married, they took over her father's family farm until the Depression forced them to sell it, and moved to Waterloo, Iowa, where Charles opened a grocery store and ran it until his retirement.

Dolores attended St. John Elementary School, run by the Mercy Sisters, and completed her secondary education at Our Lady of Victory Academy, where she met the BVMs. She then studied two years at Clarke College (now University). "It was 'love at first sight' for me," she wrote. "The campus was a rolling green blanket heavily populated with magnificent fir trees. In spring, the ground was covered with violets and lilies of the valley . . . The twin spires of the college chapel dominated the scene . . . For an 18-year-old, I was remarkably impressed with the Sister faculty. They seemed to have everything! I found them to be brilliant, personable, lively, and very committed to their vocations and to each student in the classroom and out."

Dolores entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1948, and received the name Jeanne Michele upon her reception on March 19, 1949. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1951, and lived 71 years as a BVM. In an open letter to her friends in 2007, Dolores wrote, "And so life goes on! As a freshman at Clarke College long years ago, I knew I wanted to be a BVM. It gets better all the time."

Dolores taught elementary classes at St. Thomas the Apostle in West Hempstead, N.Y.; Sacred Heart and St. Callistus in Chicago; St. Gilbert in Grayslake, Ill.; and Sacred Heart and Corpus Christi in Fort Dodge, Iowa. She also served as a secondary school teacher at St. Mary in Chicago; St. Joseph Academy in Des Moines; St. Mary and Mater Dei in Clinton, Iowa; Mount Carmel in Wichita, Kans.; Holy Family in Glendale, Calif.; and O'Hara in Kansas City, Mo.

Dolores fondly recalls summer school at Clarke. "I looked forward to summer school all year long," she shared. "Though we studied hard and were well-challenged by our BVM teachers, it was also a time of relaxation. It meant long walks on long summer evenings around the lovely Clarke campus. It meant swimming and tennis and square dancing and singing. It meant meeting old friends and making new ones . . . It meant exchanging confidences with old novitiate friends, bringing one another up-to-date on our respective lives."

While Dolores was a wonderful teacher who dearly cared about and loved her students, her dream was to minister as a spiritual director. The first step to realizing her calling happened in 1972 when BVM President Roberta Kuhn asked Dolores to work on a community project. For the next three years, Dolores served as the chair of the Person in Community Commission and a member of its four sub-commissions: Initial Formation, Prayer and Renewal, Ongoing Formation, and Retirement. Ongoing Formation was her special responsibility and from it the BVM Phase II Renewal Weekends were conceived and implemented, with Dolores conducting 27 spirituality workshops across the country, including a large annual gathering at Mundelein College in Chicago.

Over and over BVMs gathered to ponder prayer, community, social justice, vows, leisure and the arts, spiritual direction, BVM charism, and discernment. "I know these were grace-filled years for many BVMs," related Dolores. "It served to deepen the spirituality of the BVM Congregation."

After the commissions were discontinued, Dolores attended the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., for a year of intensive training in spiritual direction and retreat work. For the next two decades, she directed summer retreats at the Jesuit Retreat House in Oshkosh, Wis., where she enjoyed both the retreatants and the beautiful environment. She also ministered as spiritual director at the Jesuit Retreat House in Los Altos, Calif., and at the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University-Chicago. In addition, she served as pastoral associate and coordinator of the renewal program at St. Edward Parish in Waterloo, Iowa, worked as an administrative assistant in the Religious Studies Department at Mundelein College, and served as coordinator of the Women's Spirituality Program at Wright Hall.

In the Gospel account of the Transformation we hear, "From a cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my chosen Son; listen to him.'" (Luke 9:35). As a spiritual director for almost 50 years, Dolores guided countless individuals into a more profound and intimate relationship with God, helping them to "listen" and discern God's amazing plan for their lives. She was genuinely interested in their lives and offered great encouragement. The depth of spiritual growth and the love of God she witnessed was inspiring. "My interest in spirituality has been a most enriching part of my life," she shared. "I am grateful for the opportunities to develop it."

Dolores had two life-long passions: reading, from the time her mother taught her how at a very young age, and playing the piano. During her retirement, she explored her artist talents by crafting greeting cards with watercolor landscapes and seascapes, reminiscent of her youth when she drew and created comic strips. She also loved to throw parties to coincide with holidays, Academy Awards, elections, and sporting events. Dolores expressed gratitude for the opportunity to travel to Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador and to Ireland with the BVM tour in honor of Mary Frances Clarke. She also visited Western Europe, where she enjoyed speaking Spanish in Spain. After moving to Mount Carmel, Dolores joined a book club, wrote articles for BVM publications, gave directed retreats and spirituality lectures, and joined a prayer group that gained so much from her rich and inspiring sharings and her ability to quote scripture and other spiritual writings.

Dolores was a deeply spiritual and contemplative woman, a calm and joyful presence, a person of prayer who continues to pray for each and every one of us. Thank you, Dolores, for challenging and directing us on our spiritual journeys to a more intimate relationship with our loving God.