



Eulogy of Sister Anne Marie (St. Bridget) Mullen, BVM

Caritas Studio, Nov. 16, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Anne Marie Mullen.

Anne Marie Mullen was born in Omaha, Neb., on Feb. 3, 1933, to John Michael and Florence (Mullaly) Mullen. An older sister Betty Jeanne and a younger brother Jack completed the family. Anne Marie attend St. Bridget Grade School and Cathedral High School in Omaha and, reportedly, was an avid and talented the tennis player in her early years.

After a year of study at Creighton University while working at the Omaha Flour Mills Co., Anne Marie entered the BVM congregation on Sept. 8, 1951. She received the name St. Bridget upon her reception on March 19, 1952, professed first vows on March 19, 1954, and lived 69 years as a BVM.

Over the next decade, she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics from Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa, and Master of Science in counseling and guidance from Creighton University in Omaha.

Anne Marie ministered in elementary education for 20 years. Her first mission was teaching seventh and eighth grade at Mount St. Gertrude Academy in Boulder, Colo. Missions as a primary and junior high teacher followed at St. Ann and St. Joseph in Butte, Mont.; St. John in Des Moines, Iowa; Our Lady of Lourdes in Chicago; St. Gertrude in Stockton, Calif.; and at St. Bridget in Omaha, where she also was the principal.

Anne Marie served as the executive director of the St. James Home and Day Care Center in Omaha, which served over 200 children daily—some infants awaiting adoption, some whose families were in crisis and needed residential care, some with single parents who needed day care so they could support their family, and almost all from low income families. During her five years as director, the number of children served yearly more than doubled. This was made possible by the successful fundraising Anne Marie spearheaded. “With God’s blessings and guidance and your continued support,” she wrote to benefactors, “I am sure we will be able to accomplish even more for his children in the months to come.”

Anne Marie left Omaha in 1977 to become the executive director at the James Barry-Robinson Institute in Virginia Beach, Va. The institute originally opened in 1933 to provide a home and an education for fatherless boys. Anne Marie oversaw the efforts to create a new academic program that moved from serving “orphans” to serving “boys with special needs [and] emotionally disturbed youths with learning disabilities.” “They will be boys with stressful family situations or with behavior problems that might lead to delinquency,” said Anne Marie. “Barry-Robinson will not be a detention center. It will be a *prevention* center.”

Upon her departure in 1983, the bishop of the Diocese of Richmond wrote, “The board [of trustees] can justifiably be most proud of the program at Barry-Robinson. [It] is truly a credit to the leadership of Sister Anne Mullen and her staff.” The superintendent of schools added, “You have made an outstanding contribution to the education of young people greatly in need of the sensitive and firm leadership you have provided.” The senior social worker at the City of Norfolk Department of Resources commented, “We will very much miss the caring, concern, and

individual attention which you have given to all of our children. To say that you have been responsible for so much of their maturation would be an understatement.”

Anne Marie went on to serve as a counselor at St Paul High School in San Francisco and at Quigley Preparatory Seminary, Mount Carmel High School and St. Benedict High School, all in Chicago. After retiring from teaching, she studied computers and later worked as a certified computer technician at Wright Hall in Chicago. She could take apart a computer and put it back together—and, yes, it still worked. She also worked as a bookkeeper at the Institute of Spiritual Leadership in Chicago.

Anne Marie was actively involved in the communities in which she lived. Her interest in the welfare of children prompted her participation on the Omaha Children’s Committee. This caught the attention of the city’s mayor, who appointed her to serve on the Commission on the Status of Women. In recognition of her service, the mayor wrote, “You have earned the respect of all who worked with you. Thank you for your contribution toward improving the lives of our citizens during a period of increasing awareness of problems faced by women and children.”

Anne Marie also participated in the Rate Review Panel for the Department of Welfare in the Commonwealth of Virginia, which reviewed budgetary materials from residential facilities. In gratitude, the commissioner wrote, “Your involvement . . . is an excellent example of cooperation between the public and private sectors. Your expertise and advice has been invaluable.”

Anne Marie also had an immense compassion and affection for the sick and the elderly. She volunteered at Norwood Crossing Nursing Home in Chicago, which greatly appreciated her assistance helping residents to the community room for the weekly onsite Mass. In 2015, she received their Lifetime Achievement Service Award for 15 years of dedicated and loving service.

Anne Marie enjoyed gardening, especially growing flowers to make beautiful bouquets for her apartment. She had a love of music, the symphony in particular. She also liked Sudoku and both word and jigsaw puzzles.

Her ability to offer tech support and make house repairs made her a valuable resident at Edmunds Street in Chicago. Mary Lou Wetzell, BVM lived across the hall from her for many years. “Anne Marie was a good neighbor,” commented Mary Lou. “She was a helpful person especially during the time my mother lived with me. I could always count on her in a time of need. [She also] was the lucky person that I woke up in the middle of the night to catch the bat. Thank goodness, she was a brave one!”

Yes, Anne Marie was brave as well as capable, reliable, energetic, determined, independent, and feisty. Yet her life was centered on loving her neighbor—the children, the elderly, the sick, the troubled, and the disenfranchised—as Jesus commanded (Mark 12:31). In doing so, she made visible “the love of God [that was] poured into [her heart] through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5).

While Ann Marie is no longer physically present with us, her wonderful, feisty spirit remains, as does the hope for a glorious reunion one day that will not disappoint.