



## **Eulogy of Sister Mary (Thomas Daniel) Donahey, BVM**

Caritas Studio, Dec. 21, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be here to celebrate the life of our Sister Mary Donahey.

Mary Ellen Donahey was born on March 15, 1938, in Des Moines, Iowa, to Daniel and Loretta (Cook) Donahey, whose farm was located in Panora, Iowa. Mary had two older brothers, John Michael and Dan, and one younger brother, Tom. Describing her childhood, she shared, "I worked on the farm. I enjoyed working outside much more than inside . . . I was about 12 [when] we got a tractor. Before that we farmed with horses, and so I really liked to drive that tractor."

After attending Panora public schools, Mary earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics with a biology minor from Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. The call to religious life came while she was a junior. The college chaplain suggested visiting a variety of religious orders. Mary referred to a book of religious communities that included photographs and descriptions. "I went through that like you would on the farm . . . go through the Earl May Seed catalog, and picked out an order," she confessed. Her search ended after visiting with the Sister Roberta (Alberto) Kuhn, a provincial superior at that time, and Sister Annunciante O'Keefe, the Sister Superior at St. Bridget's in Omaha. "Both of these Sisters impressed me with their genuine concern for my vocation," she wrote. Of course, Mary, always wanting to be thorough, read *In the Early Days*, about the founding of the BVM congregation. "The spirit on which the congregation was founded, especially perseverance, has impressed me," she commented. "Two qualities . . . which appeal to me, besides its sanctity . . . are its simplicity and directness."

Mary entered the congregation on July 31, 1960, and received the name Thomas Daniel at her reception on Feb. 2, 1961. She entered with 118 others in her set, but after a month the number slowly declined. "I remember I was always very alert to whoever was [still] coming into the room," she noted. One day the postulant mistress, Sister Benedicta O'Connor, said to her, "Your custody of the eyes is not too good." Nonetheless, Sister Benedicta selected Mary to be her secretary.

Mary professed first vows on Feb. 2, 1963, and lived 60 years as a BVM. After profession, she was sent to study at Marquette University. She taught theology at Mundelein College in Chicago for a year, but then returned to Marquette University to complete a master's degree in theology. After two months teaching theology at Clarke University, she again returned to the religious studies department at Mundelein where she served 20 years as an instructor, associate professor and department chair. "I enjoyed Mundelein very much," Mary commented. "Every meal [there was] a very stimulating conversation because at the table there would be somebody in psychology, economics, philosophy, and any of the other disciplines . . . [Being] inquisitive . . . I loved that!"

Mary earned a master's degree in philosophy and a doctorate in religion and ethics from Columbia University in New York. Through the years, she was a theology teacher in the BVM novitiate, a part-time adjunct lecturer for the religion department at John Jay College for Criminal Justice in New York, a member of a teaching team at the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, an exchange professor at the Catholic Theological Union Seminary also in Chicago, and gave numerous public lectures.

In 1976, Mary made a six-week pilgrimage to India to observe and study their spiritual traditions. She visited 11 cities by car, plane, rickshaw, train, elephant, camel, and on foot. "So religious are the Hindus," she said. "[T]hey see the manifestation of God in everyone and everything. Have you ever been greeted by an Indian? He places his hand in the prayer position and bows gently before you, worshipping the divine in you." Mary was extremely impressed by India's abundant spiritual tradition.

When Mundelein was folded into Loyola University Chicago in 1991, Mary was hired as an associate professor of religion at Loyola and later named a senior professor. After retiring from teaching, she served as treasurer at Wright Hall. For Mary, it was an opportunity to live out the service implications of the theology she taught for so many years. She moved to Mount Carmel in 2011 when Wright Hall closed.

Mary was an avid reader and very attentive to local and world events. The entire Donahey family was interested in politics. Mary's interest manifested itself in BVM governance process. As a very young sister, she was one of three temporarily professed sisters to represent their group at the 10th General Chapter. The three traveled to the chapter and waited outside while the perpetually professed decided whether or not to accept them as representatives. They did, marking the first time temporarily professed sisters were admitted as full voting members at a BVM Chapter. In subsequent years, Mary served as a senator, a voting member, and a member of several BVM committees.

When asked how the BVM experience affected her life, Mary replied, "Having three brothers, I have been most affected by having so many [BVM] sisters . . . These sisters have radicalized me as a feminist and a Christian . . . Always around me [were] some who live the feminist, Christian life in a more profound way than I . . . They have the knack of beckoning me on in the most enticing fashion. They have been a grace to and for me. I thank God for their sensitivity, generosity, and courage, which have strengthened me."

Mary struggled with health issues most of her life. After contracting polio at age eleven, she was left with some paralysis. She had two surgeries to correct scoliosis that required her to wear a body cast for many months. She was tremendously patient and accepting of her pain and performed in spite of it. In her later years, she used a motorized scooter to move about. That didn't keep her from volunteering throughout the Mount Carmel campus.

Mary was a wise woman—a kind, thoughtful, soft-spoken person who had the ability to speak just the right words when they most needed to be heard. Her intelligence was unquestionable, her demeanor phenomenally calm and down-to-earth, and her sense of humor as lively as the twinkle in her eyes. She was an enduring spirit and a gift to her family, her set, the BVM community and every person who was fortunate enough to have known her. "Come, [Mary], O blessed of God. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34).