



Eulogy of Sister Joanne (Lisbeth) Simonini, BVM Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 3, 2021

Good morning. It is good for us to be together to celebrate of life of our Sister Joanne Simonini.

Rinalda Joanne Simonini was born on Aug. 12, 1931, in Des Moines, Iowa. She was the youngest child of Ray and Anita (Prosperi) Simonini and joined a sister, Elizabeth (Betty). Her mother was born in Des Moines, but her maternal grandparents were born in Bagni di Lucca, Italy. Her father was born in that same Italian town and immigrated to the United States at the age of 17, settling in Des Moines.

Joanne attended St. Ambrose Grade School and St. Joseph Academy in Des Moines. After graduation, she studied at Clarke University for two years. "I have always attended BVM schools," she commented. "I was always impressed with the kindness of our sisters and the wonderful community spirit I experienced."

Joanne entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1951, and received the name Lisbeth upon her reception on March 19, 1952. She professed first vows on March 19, 1954, and lived 69 years as a BVM. She completed a bachelor's degree in English from Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa, and a master's degree in library science from Rosary College in River Forest, Ill.

After profession, Joanne was missioned as a primary teacher at St. Aloysius in Kansas City, Mo., which was followed by St. Philip in Pasadena, Calif. She briefly served as a secondary teacher and librarian at Bellarmine-Jefferson in Burbank, Calif., and then returned to Kansas City to teach first grade at St. Catherine, where she remained for the next 15 years.

Joanne moved to Des Moines in 1974 to teach non-graded primary at St. John before assuming the role of principal the following year. In 1981, she became the first principal at Holy Family School which was formed by the consolidation of St. John, Visitation, and St. Peter schools. Holy Family was then, and continues to be, a diverse multicultural community. "It was both fun and interesting," Joanne commented.

She enjoyed being part of the reorganization as well as serving on the Diocesan Sisters Council, Diocesan Regional Pastoral Council, and the Diocesan Board of Education. It's not surprising that she returned to Holy Family to volunteer after retiring.

Joanne brought out the best in her students. She inspired and encouraged them to develop and use their gifts to the fullest. In the introduction to *Your Affectionate*, Sister Kitty Lawlor wrote, "Even in her directions on teaching, [Mary Frances Clarke] encouraged the sisters to listen to the voices of the children." Joanne truly listened to the voices of her students for each one was precious in her eyes and, by doing so, won their admiration.

Joanne worked briefly as a customer service representative for a Des Moines insurance agency before becoming the director of religious education at St. Joseph in Des Moines. Ten years later she retired from the position but remained active as a parish volunteer until moving to Mount Carmel.

Joanne had a beautiful smile and a very distinctive laugh. She was a strong extrovert as well as generous, welcoming, and fun-loving. She was delighted to invite people into her home in Pleasant Hill, Iowa, and to share the excellent culinary skills she inherited from her mother. She even hosted the reception ceremony for a new BVM Associate.

Joanne was an avid reader all of her life; it was her way to unwind after a busy day. Her background in library science prepared her well to serve on the book selection committee for the Motherhouse library. She also served on the Sisters Development Network for seven years.

Joanne was a deeply loyal and faithfully telephoned and corresponded with her friends. She loved her sister Betty, who died in 1989, and her niece Suzanne and was extremely proud of Suzanne's daughter Julia who is an author and illustrator of children's books.

"I have always had good, positive community experiences and have been very grateful for all the love and friendship I have experienced as well as the love and care shown my family. The many family and faculty members I have met and ministered with through the years have been a wonderful example of faith and love. I have also been privileged to minister with caring pastors and religious from other communities as well as many lay people who have been special to me," Joanne said.

A friendship between Joanne and Sister Dolores Marie McHugh began in 1965 when Dolores joined Joanne at St. Catherine in Kansas City. Last year on April 24, Dolores celebrated her birthday both into earthy life and into eternal life. Perhaps Dolores heard the prayers of some of our sisters and called Joanne home to celebrate together.

What we can be certain about is that "God has made everything appropriate to its time, and has put the timeless into their hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Joanne has joined her parents, her sister Betty, Dolores, Mary Frances Clarke, and all dearly departed BVM sisters, relatives and friends and now knows a joy beyond all imagination. Thanks be to God!