



**Eulogy of Sister Cora Keegan, BVM**  
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, July 2, 2021

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Cora Keegan.

Irene Ann Keegan, the first child of Ernest and Cora (DeMeyer) Keegan, was born on Nov. 1, 1935, in San Francisco. Her sisters Marian and Elsie completed the family. Marian died this past January. Their father, a San Francisco native of Irish descent, worked as an assistant supervisor at the Laguna Honda Home, a relief home for indigents that later became Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center. Her mother was born in Boise, Idaho, but her family originated from Belgium. She worked as a nurse and, in time, all three daughters joined her in the nursing profession.

Irene completed her elementary education at Most Holy Redeemer and graduated from St. Paul High School in 1953. She spent the summer working at Southern Pacific Railroad before entering the congregation on Sept. 8, 1953. She received the name Cora, after her mother, upon her reception on March 19, 1954. An illness forced her to return home in November 1954. She reentered on Jan. 24, 1959, but always celebrated with the Set of 1958. She professed first vows on Feb. 2, 1961, and lived 62 years as a BVM.

After profession, Cora worked in the development office at Mount Carmel through the spring and summer. In the fall, she taught sixth grade at St. Francis Xavier in Phoenix. She also was missioned as a sixth grade teacher at Holy Family in Glendale and St. Philip in Pasadena, Calif. During these years, Cora was a natural caregiver to the elderly and the infirmed at the local convents and often returned to Dubuque to give summer service to the sisters at Mount Carmel.

Cora completed her training as a registered nurse through Pasadena City College in 1974. During her 31 years as an RN, she ministered to our retired sisters at Guadalupe College while she worked at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Gatos, before she transferred to Mount Zion Medical Center and the U.C.S.F. Medical Center in San Francisco.

As a nurse, she showed her love to the patients entrusted to her care, especially to those at Mount Zion. Assigned to the pediatric intensive care unit, Cora cared for infants born with physical deformities. These deformities were so unpleasant to the eye that their own parents often refused to embrace them. Cora's time was spent holding the babies in a loving embrace until they died. The BVMs with whom she lived remember well how deeply saddened Cora was by this.

Understandably, her nursing partners described Cora as an exceptionally professional and caring nurse. BVM President Helen Maher Garvey mentioned Cora and her ministry in a talk about women in the church. "Cora's contribution to the church is a contribution of nurturance and fidelity. Her position is not one that was assigned, but one which she chose because she understood well her own personal gifts."

Cora remained in San Francisco for almost 30 years to be close to her mother, who lived well into her 90s. She usually left immediately at the end of her shift to be with her mother. During these years, she graciously accompanied many ill West Coast sisters on their journey home to Mount Carmel. Soon after her mother's death in 2005, she, herself, moved to Dubuque

Once in Dubuque, Cora became a full-time volunteer at Mount Carmel. Companionship with sisters to medical appointments was her primary ministry. She truly was *the* perfect companion. Fostering a relationship of trust was essential so that the sisters would share with her their questions and concerns. Cora took notes during conversations with medical personnel, asked questions, and expected complete and thorough responses. She patiently provided explanations to the sisters and repeated doctors' instructions.

Some claim that Cora was the most private person they had ever met. That may be true because Cora learned early in life to accept serious health issues and keep them to herself. She certainly was one of a kind. When one sister told Cora that she was a "crusty old nurse," she simply laughed. She knew that she loved discipline in her personal life. She completed tasks quickly and efficiently. She had a no-nonsense attitude and didn't tolerate foolishness. She expected patients to follow doctor's orders and she demanded that of herself as well. She was straightforward, honest, told it like it was, and people appreciated her candor. No wonder so many staff and sisters sought her advice.

Yet, for all of her sternness, she had a huge, caring heart that wept for the sick and suffering. Rarely did she accept or ask for help. She *lived* to help and assist others. Her last few years, Cora faced physical difficulties, pain, and loss. Perhaps foremost among them: the inability to continue the ministry she loved. And like many medical professionals, her knowledge of what was happening in her own body made this ending time especially difficult for her. Yet, she never complained.

St. Peter said to the man crippled from birth, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ, rise and walk." (Acts 3:6). Cora most certainly shared what she had and worked "miracles" relieving anxiety and restoring peace of mind

For Cora, it was not about her type of ministry, but rather the loving manner with which she carried it out to nurture freedom in others. She did this with a most compassionate and loving heart.

Well done, good and faithful servant! Rest in peace, Cora, until we meet again.