



## Sharing of Memories of Mary Angela Buser, BVM Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, July 14, 2021

### **Anne Kendall, BVM**

In the days when we had superiors and principals, Mary Angela Buser fulfilled these roles. Many “young” sisters were sent to St. Thomas the Apostle convent in West Hempstead, N.Y., and many of them left the community. I know that this was very difficult for Angela because she did not want to be the cause of someone leaving. Meanwhile, she was overseeing a K-8 school with 50 children in each room, and she had to interact with a very difficult pastor. After superiors were no longer, she remained as principal at St. Thomas for a few years.

Mary Angela was very close to her family whether they were in Kansas or scattered throughout the country. Her sister Veronica became a BVM Associate and her sister Danetta was a BVM. They came from strong stock and lived well into old age.

As Mary Angela’s eyesight failed, she made use of different devices which would enable her to read documents and letters. She was ever grateful for any communication and when one came to see her she would recognize his or her voice even if she could barely make out who they were.

Mary Angela’s spiritual life was rich as she moved with the Spirit and tried many different forms of prayer.

I am ever grateful to Mary Angela for many things, the most being that she welcomed me back to New York after three turbulent years in Sioux City where I had suddenly been changed by the provincial.

### **Karen Conover, BVM**

I lived with Mary Angela’s sister Sister Danetta in Kansas City in the 1970s, and so I got to know several of her blood sisters. When I was one of the seven BVMs being considered for the new positions of Congregational Representatives, we came to Dubuque in January 2015 for a time of presentation and questions from the assembled sisters. When the session was finished, Mary Angela made a bee-line for me and said, as a good recruiter would, “*You know, there are several other positions here that need a BVM, and I think you would be good in one or another of them.*”

I knew I had no Dubuque connections and so I didn’t think I was the right person for the Roberta Kuhn Center director. And I just couldn’t see leaving San Francisco for a half-time position as BVM Life Facilitator. But I was drawn to the multi-faceted job in Support Services. Before I traveled back to San Francisco, Mary Angela and I talked about why she thought it would be good fit, and why the sisters would welcome me in the position. She had a wonderful, direct way of affirming people.

When I knew I had not been elected to the Congregational Representative position, I came to Mount Carmel over Easter Week to shadow the director of Support Services, Angele Lutgen, to see if the job was something that was “right” for me. The direct service to the sisters here was the most attractive aspect of the position. Again, I was affirmed by Mary Angela and she promised her prayers.

Over the past six years, I have regularly reminded her that *she* was the reason I am working here and we had a good chuckle together at how God works. Thank you, Mary Angela, for being my cheerleader. We'll keep trusting in your prayers for us.

**Bernie and Sheila Koetting, nephew and niece-in-law**

We will miss talking with you, Aunt Pat. Having known you all his life, Bernie has so many memories; he can't pick out just a few. And I recall meeting you and the three other aunts who were nuns at Grandma and Grandpa's house before we were married. At the time, I couldn't tell which name went with which nun as you were all wearing habits and with only a portion of your faces showing. But after joining this wonderful family, I soon learned how unique each of you were. Now you are all together again. How joyous! You are all in our prayers. Rest in peace, Aunt Pat.

**Carolyn Buser, niece-in-law**

Aunt Pat was my husband Dick's youngest aunt. I loved her from the first time I met her as newlywed in Albuquerque, N. M. She was a wonderful loving person who listened to me over the phone when my husband, my sister, and my brother died and shared my grief. Jesus will welcome her with open arms.

**Michelle Jefferson, former student**

My name is Michelle Jefferson and I am a former student of Sister Mary Angela, whom I dearly love and also consider my friend and mentor. Over the years she and I stayed in contact after she supported me in obtaining my GED diploma in January of 2000. Additionally, she was there for me when I decided to go to college and obtain my degree in the field of education as an educator and as I accepted different positions working in the school system while raising my two daughters. Yes, she was there for it all!

Sister Mary Angela has always been right here with me cheering me forward, giving me constant advice and checking on the girls and me. As much as I want to cry, I am also at peace because I had an opportunity to speak to her recently. Although she was in pain, she was still cheering for me and asking me how I was doing and to "make sure" I continue moving forward doing what God has called on me to do—educating, supporting, and serving children, families, and the community. I told her I will!

The love she has given over the years and the time she spent with my daughters I will carry forward as I know that's what she would also want me to continue to do. God placed her in our lives for a *great* purpose—to be light, to love, and to show us the way; that she did and has done. May she now rest in peace and may her love continue to shine through us all. God bless.

**Mary McCauley, BVM**

My first assignment following the Scholasticate was to Our Lady of Loretto in Hempstead, N.Y. Shortly after my arrival, there was a gathering of the BVMs who served in our three New York schools. It was at that gathering that I first met Mary Angela. At the time she was an experienced, admired, and well-liked junior high teacher at St. Thomas the Apostle and had been for a few years. The following year she was appointed as the superior and principal of St. Thomas.

Fast forward nine years and I was asked to succeed her as principal. For those of you who know Mary Angela well, you know that I could not have followed a more organized, caring, or sensitive principal. What a blessing she was to me! She offered wise counsel and did her best to prepare me for a totally new role and for this I shall always be grateful.

Fortunately my relationship with Mary Angela did not cease after she offered me an infamous crash course in how to be a principal. We remained friends throughout the years. I shall always be grateful for her special spirit, her concern for the poor, her continued interest in BVM community issues, her faithful prayer, her delightful laugh, and finally for the way in which she invited me and others to journey with her as she prepared for her death.

Thank you, Mary Angela, for doing so much more for me than offering me that infamous crash course in how to be a principal!

### **Margaret McCulloch, BVM**

Mary Angela was an excellent principal, one who respected her faculty and always encouraged them to do their best. When I was at St. Thomas the Apostle, it was a big school with three rooms of every grade and about 900 to 1,000 students. I taught math in both seventh and eighth grades and Angela allowed us to adjust our schedule so we could have both large and small group classes. This involved starting school earlier than the lower grades and ending later than the lower grades. She also let us experiment with parent-teacher conferences by having all three teachers meet as a group with each set of parents. Angela also encouraged us to interact with students in extra-curricular activities such as organizing and coaching the girls' basketball teams.

Angela was a great person to live with—friendly, kind, and one of the group. You always felt very comfortable with her. She also encouraged us to take advantage of being close to New York City and its marvelous theatre district. Angela made living and ministering at St. Thomas a great experience, one of my favorite missions.

### **John J. Serio SDB, Salesian High School, New Rochelle, N.Y.**

Sister Mary Angela was the principal of St. Thomas the Apostle School from when I entered fourth grade through my graduation in 1967. It was an era of great change both in church and society. During that time, the sisters changed from a habit to secular clothes. When she was wearing the habit, of course, her hair was covered, but we could see that she had brown eyebrows. When she removed her veil, a startled student gasped, "She fooled us; she has grey hair."

When I entered the Salesians in 1971, I visited Sister Mary Angela as she was leaving St. Thomas. She told me, "You know, I have cousins who are Salesians." Actually, six of her cousins left their Kansas farm and had entered the Salesians or Salesian Sisters. I had the great opportunity to live in community with one of them, who was a marvelous example of generosity, hard work, and kindness. Those qualities ran in the family.

Whenever I would go to Chicago to visit my brother, Steve, or attend some educational conference, I always went to 1114 South May St. to visit Sister. We would have a great conversation and go out for lunch. I marveled that she chose to live in inner-city Chicago after her years at Clarke. When I would tell her that, she would say, "Well, your brother Frank had something to do with it." I wondered how that was possible. It seems that when Frank was in the eighth grade, Sister was visiting classrooms, and as she put it, "waxing eloquent about working for the poor." My brother allegedly stood up and said, "Well, Sister, if it's that good, why don't you try it yourself?" I'm not sure she had an answer for him at that moment. But needless to say, eventually that's what she did!

For me, the passing of Sister Mary Angela marks the last of the BVMs who taught me or were principals during my years at St. Thomas. Helen Garvey, Gertrude Ann Sullivan, Maureen Whalen, Mary Ancile Carton, Ella Marie Wright, Kathryn McDonald were among those who educated and formed me and so many of us in the late 1950s and through the 1960s. They had influence on us that for some has lasted a lifetime.

Sister Mary Angela oversaw it all. She encouraged the faculty to make St. Thomas the best school possible, she treated people with kindness and respect, and to us kids she made it seem effortless. She loved hearing about her former students and their families, and even a few months ago, she wanted a report on all my siblings.

I have said several times, in words of remembrance and at liturgies at Mount Carmel, "We can never be grateful enough for the sacrifices, the hours, the love, and devotion the sisters and their collaborators offered on our behalf."

Thank you, Sister Mary Angela, for your love for God, your sisters, and the people with whom you ministered through all these years. Thank you for your friendship and for your fidelity to your vocation over these 75 years.

You have been blessed by God and you have been a blessing to all of us, Sister. May you be seated at the heavenly banquet feast prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

**Eva V. Chomka, MD, FACC,FACP, former associate professor of Clinical Medicine, University of Illinois**

I knew Sister Mary Angela as a patient. I was her cardiologist in Chicago at the University of Illinois. She was living and working at Holy Family Parish at the time. I appreciated her compassion and love for others. She was a kind soul and had grace that is associated with the Blessed Mother.

She worked with specific groups at church and truly enjoyed interacting with parishioners. She was highly organized and used logic in her decisions. She had a passion for her religious life. She said the BVMs were the intellectual relatives of the Jesuits. She truly loved being a sister and was totally dedicated to God.

The University of Illinois Medical Center was not far from Holy Family Church. Although I did not belong to Holy Family, they had religious services for special occasions that I attended. One was related to St. Ignatius College preparation and the National Honor Society, and another to commemorating the Our Lady of Angels fire by its survivors and in memory of those who died.

We kept in touch after she left for the Motherhouse. I will cherish her memory, and know that she has merited heaven. May God have mercy on her soul and may she enjoy eternal life. May Christ welcome her to heaven and Blessed Mother also greet her.

**Ann Landers, CSJ**

I'm writing to all of you offering my sympathy and prayers on the death of Mary Angela Buser. Her family here in Kansas City, Mo., kept me up on Mary Angela's health issues and Sheila Koetting told me this morning of her passing. I lived with Danetta Buser at St. Therese Little Flower convent here in Kansas City. Her sisters Mary Angela and Margaret Ann, CSJ from Concordia spent holidays and time in the summers with us so I got to know Mary Angela well—a wonderful, holy woman! She will be missed for sure. Again, my prayers are for all of you.

**Nancy McCarville, associate and former BVM**

Mary Angela often referred to "God's will for her." Well, it was God's will that, by chance, we crossed paths at the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of Mary Frances Clarke. It had been 35 years since we were missioned on Long Island: She the school principal at West Hempstead and I, fresh out of the Scholasticate, assigned to Bellerose. Despite trying to jog her memory with detailed accounts of inter-house activities that we had enjoyed together, it was to no avail. She didn't remember me!

You would think that would have ended the conversation but soon she was inviting me to join her and Sisters Otilie Sana and Marion Murphy as volunteers at Westside Education and Employment Center (WEEC) in Chicago. During the next two years it was the good old days all over again tutoring with BVMs. Eventually, after I relocated to Waterloo and Mary Angela relocated to Mount Carmel, I took up her invitation to pursue BVM Association and I asked her to accompany me.

A listener par excellence, Mary Angela kept pace with my reactions and responses as I engaged the lessons. I was especially interested to see how my BVM spiritual formation and education correlated with the core values and social justice concerns. It was a freeing experience. Her affirmation and encouragement, "Be yourself!" highlighted those moments.

So, we both were ourselves. She the calm, clear thinker and I spontaneous and uninhibited! Throughout my 10 years as associate, she fostered my reconnection with BVMs. And that has been God's will for me. Gratitude, Mary Angela, you are sharing your peace with us.

**Kathleen Mullin, BVM**

Those of us privileged to know Mary Angela and her sister Danetta are aware of significant qualities each of them lived: a strong work ethic, generosity, love expressed quietly and persistently, growth in spirituality, and deep gratitude. We've learned that Mary Angela was a "born teacher," playing school in her early years and reading voraciously whenever possible. She enthusiastically taught and was principal in parish elementary schools, trained student teachers at Clarke University and gave hope to GED students. Mary Angela sought to give everyone a life-long hunger for learning. She also mentored scores of us through the years.

In the final stretch of her fulfilling long life, Mary Angela expressed gratitude over and over, for her primary and extended family members, for the BVMs and Associates, for other friends and colleagues, for those who met her needs at Mount Carmel Bluffs. I thank you, Mary Angela, for your love and your lessons which I continue to absorb and practice.

#### **Irene Lukefahr, BVM**

I first got to know Mary Angela through her sister Danetta, who played an important part in our Novitiate days and became a friend as I matured. It is only in the last few years that Mary Angela and I developed a deeper friendship. Mary Angela was a kind, welcoming, inspiring, and prayerful woman. She was a courageous woman who was determined to live life as fully as possible despite many challenging health issues. She was honest, realistic, and always searching to discern what God might be asking of her at the present moment.

Just a few weeks ago, I went to her bedside and asked if she would want me to read the most recent letter from Mary Frances Clarke, alias Mary McCauley. She listened attentively and told me she would put her hand up if she wanted me to stop so she could take in what she was hearing. When she put her hand down, that was a signal that I could continue. After our reading, she said she was going to use Mary Frances' letter during her private retreat, which was to begin in just a few days. I imagine Mary Angela and Mary Frances are now discussing the contents of that letter, and so much more. Be at peace, Mary Angela. Thank you for being a loving companion and supportive friend.

#### **Joyce Church**

I'm so very sad to hear this news. Sister Mary Angela was the principal at St. Francis in Kansas City, Mo., and I taught there with her. She was a very good friend and a wonderful teacher. I have many, many wonderful memories of the years we were together. She was so good to me. She's always had a piece of my heart and will continue to do so. My prayers and sympathy to her family and many friends.

#### **Jenny Robertson**

I was so blessed to have known her when I was little. Her brother is my grandpa Bus or C.D. Buser. I remember seeing her at the family weddings, holidays, and my grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary. She was always so sweet and so full of life. She will be dearly missed. She is home now. Rest in peace, Great Aunt Pat.

#### **Kathleen Walton, Holy Family Faith community member**

We, the Holy Family Faith Community submit this prayer hopefully to be read as part of the Prayers of the Faithful. If this is not possible, please place where you see it belongs. Forever grateful for the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Loving God, we, the Holy Family Faith Community, thank you for granting us the blessed gift of your faithful and obedient servant, Sister Mary Angela, whose tireless work and endless, heartfelt prayers drew us into everlasting friendships. Her sweet spirit will always rest in our hearts, continuing to remind us to walk by faith, not by eyesight and, in all we do, to pay attention to the smallest details. Holy Mary, Mother of Jesus the Christ, may your open arms embrace and guide Sister Mary Angela's loving spirit into eternal Life. Let the church say Amen.