



Eulogy of Sister Margaret M. (Martha Ann) Kasper, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Aug. 10, 2021

Good morning. It is good for us to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Margaret M. Kasper.

Margaret Kasper and her older twin Catherine were born on Feb. 4, 1930, in Mills, Wyo., as the fifth and fourth children, respectively, of 13 born to Joseph Leo and Martha Lucinda (Congleton) Kasper. A brother David died in infancy. Her twin Catherine died in 1998.

Margaret's mother was not Catholic, while her father was baptized, but not raised, Catholic. They met on the plains of Wyoming and were married by a Justice of the Peace in Casper, Wyo. A year later, they attended a mission at St. Anthony Church in Casper. Her mother was baptized and the Kaspers became a very churchgoing family whose faith was the central focus of their lives. All 12 living children graduated from St. Anthony School.

After graduating from public high school, Margaret worked as a bookkeeper for an appliance company while she waited for her departure date to Mount Carmel. She entered the congregation on Feb. 2, 1948, along with her childhood friend Vivian C. Wilson. She received the name Martha Ann upon her reception on Aug. 15, 1948, professed first vows on Aug. 15, 1950, and lived 73 years as a BVM.

Margaret taught primary grades in Illinois at St. Charles, Holy Family, and St. Callistus in Chicago, St. Joseph in Round Lake, and St. Gilbert in Grayslake. In Iowa, she was missioned at St. Joseph in Sioux City, St. Peter in Clermont, and St. Mary and Emmetsburg Catholic in Emmetsburg. She also taught at St. Patrick in Lead, S.D., and Loyola Primary School in Denver. She served as superior and principal in Lead and Emmetsburg, and principal at Cure d'Arms and Blessed Sacrament schools in Denver.

Margaret was the youngest of the pioneer BVMs who opened St. Joseph School in Round Lake, Ill., in 1951, but her maturity and hardworking disposition would never reveal it. Later in 1966 as the principal of St. Patrick School in Lead, S.D., she had given the difficult task of closing the school. That same year, Margaret was assigned as the first principal at Emmetsburg Catholic, the new elementary school formed by the merger of St. Ellen and St. Mary, and successfully navigated the challenges that accompany such transitions.

After those back-to-back experiences, one can understand why Margaret liked being a teacher more than being a principal. She had a special affinity for teaching first graders, but she loved all of her students and her students and their parents loved her.

Nonetheless, she was an excellent principal—supportive and encouraging of her teachers and open to experimental teaching techniques. She dealt with superintendents, pastors, and parents calmly and diplomatically, but straightforwardly.

As a superior, Margaret brought a sense of freedom and openness to her sisters in the local community. She wore the role of house authority lightly. She was always up for gatherings with BVMs from other convents and highly supportive of school activities and town events where she participated simply as one of the sisters.

Margaret remained in Denver for almost 30 years after retiring from teaching. She worked as the leasing coordinator and executive director of Francis Height Apartments, Inc., an independent living retirement community. She later served as the coordinator for senior citizens and pastoral associate at Presentation of Our Lady Parish. She also was the director of volunteers and programs at Serve, Empower, Transform (SET), an outreach program for the poor whose goal was to serve others, create opportunities for empowerment, and strive to transform attitudes and values toward justice and compassion. Margaret was responsible for recruiting, training, and placing volunteers in the wellness and screening clinics operated by SET.

In 2007, Margaret moved to Mount Carmel and quickly became a very active volunteer on campus, especially in the Development Office.

Margaret dearly loved her enormous family and her Wyoming home. She looked forward to family reunions where stories, teasing, and games of all kinds abounded. All generations enjoyed the camaraderie whether playing cards and board games or outdoor activities like horseshoes, baseball, and volleyball.

She also enjoyed reading and jigsaw puzzles and hiking in the mountains. Margaret loved to talk about her family and life in Casper; it was those experiences that taught her she could do anything. She was multitalented, practical, efficient, conscientious, confident, and a good conversationalist who could give a clear voice to her strongly-held beliefs.

St. Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord, always. I shall say it again: rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Margaret was truly alive –outgoing, cheerful, enthusiastic, and energetic. In Lead, S.D., one hundred steps were built into the bluff near the convent. Margaret loved to challenge both students and BVMs to a race up the stairs, usually laughing all the way and out of breath at the top.

She easily made friends with that contagious laugh. She brought life and fun into each day whether in summer study groups at Clarke University in the early years or a weekend in Estes Park, Colo., with her Colorado Cluster.

St. Paul also wrote, "Your kindness should be known to all." (Philippians 4:5). Margaret lived a simple, disciplined life. She was most kind, loyal, and generous, willing to do anything to help, even covering an unexpected expense. She was a natural caregiver, probably skills learned from her upbringing in a large family. A friend referred to her as "a motherly presence among us."

Margaret was a hard worker and made the best out of difficult situations; complaining was just not her style. When Margaret moved into the Gables last February, she sat in her chair, looked around the room, shook her head, and said, "We are so spoiled. We have so much."

Margaret's sense of freedom birthed a spirit of generosity, a simplicity in service, and a quiet humility that are truly inspirational.

Thank you, Margaret, for being a gift to us. Rest now in peace.