



Eulogy of Sister Jean Margaret Black, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Aug. 4, 2022

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Jean Margaret Black.

Dorothy Jean Black was born August 30, 1923, the fifth of eight children born to John and Mary (McCarty) Black. Her parents farmed near Holbrook, Iowa, where they were members of the St. Michael Parish. Sadly, two of her older sisters – Kathleen and Margaret – died as infants before she was born. Her eldest sister was Sister Mary Joanita Black, BVM who died in 1990. She also had seven cousins who entered the community, five of whom remained. Her brother Joseph farmed with their father both before and after serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II and eventually took over the operation. Dorothy was very close to her sister Florence who died in 2012 after more than 50 years as an elementary educator. The youngest sibling Helen had developmental challenges and died in 2000. Her younger brother Jerry survives.

Dorothy attended rural public grade schools and two years at Parnell High School in Parnell, Iowa. She transferred to St. Mary High School in Iowa City, Iowa, to finish her secondary education and graduated in 1941. Dorothy completed teaching preparatory courses at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, during the following summer. She taught at York Township #7 rural school, located northeast of Holbrook, for three years before pursuing her call to religious life.

Dorothy entered the congregation on February 2, 1945, and received the name Jean Margaret upon her reception on August 15, 1945. She professed first vows on August 15, 1947, and lived 77 years as a BVM. She was the last surviving member of the Set of 1945.

She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in history and a minor in education from San Francisco College for Women in 1962. She earned her master's degree in reading from Clarke College in 1969.

Jean Margaret spent 44 years primarily teaching reading in the primary and intermediate grades. She was missioned at Visitation in Des Moines, Iowa; Immaculate Conception in Butte, Montana; St. Thomas More and St. Philip in San Francisco; St. Vincent in Petaluma, California; St. Mary in Lincoln, Nebraska; St. Bridget in Omaha, Nebraska; and Hayes Catholic Elementary in Muscatine, Iowa.

Jean Margaret loved living in Butte and especially enjoyed the wild horses that roamed near the grade school. The children thought she was very pretty and considered her a good teacher despite being quite strict. Sometimes they jokingly called her "General Jean."

In 1974, while at St. Bridget in Omaha, Jean Margaret was recognized as an Outstanding Elementary Teacher of America. She and retired Sister Annunciette O'Keefe closed the St. Bridget mission in 1985 after 71 years of BVM presence.

Jean Margaret moved to Dubuque in 1991 and ministered as a congregational volunteer assisting sisters in Marian Hall until moving to the Motherhouse in 1998.

Family was especially important to Jean Margaret, and she was always so happy to see them. When still able, she would travel with her BVM driver to Cedar Rapids (about the halfway point between Dubuque and Holbrook) to meet with family. Her love and pride were evident as she talked about them almost nonstop during the drive. Among her possessions were many, many photos of her with the babies in her family. Clearly, she loved children.

On Jean Margaret's 80th birthday in 2003, a family member paid tribute saying. "Dear Dorothy aka Sister Jean Margaret, you are many persons [to us] . . . a sibling, a teacher, a BVM, an aunt, a great aunt, a party animal, a sister-in-law, a cousin, a Hawkeye fan, a Big Red [Nebraska Cornhusker fan], a traveler, a [London] pub crawler, a companion and friend to many at Mount Carmel, [and] the spiritual head of the Black clan. . . [Do] you know that you also provide much needed comic relief and enjoyment in our world? Thanks for being you!"

Jean Margaret also enjoyed Lawrence Welk's polka and champagne music, and absolutely loved ice cream. The forementioned comic relief came through her witticisms and trademark expressions that flowed freely from her mouth. Standing alone, they made little sense, but in the context of the situation they entertained, surprised, and even shocked those listening.

Jean Margaret remained passionate about farming all her life. Her love of chickens was most likely attributed to her mother who raised them. She was so passionate about them that Activities purchased a toy chicken coup with a stuffed hen and chicks for her. She loved it! "You can take the girl out of the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the girl!"

Jean Margaret's vivacious spirit continued to shine as she dealt with increasing memory issues. She always desired to be most hospitable and was deeply concerned if she sensed that anyone was in any way distressed. She was quite determined and liked to be in charge like when she called bingo numbers. After moving to the Gables at Mount Carmel Bluffs, Jean Margaret could be found sitting near the fireplace stroking a stuffed cat, still smiling and talking to anyone who passed by.

St. Paul wrote, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love God' – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit." (1 Cor 2:9-10). Jean Margaret has long anticipated meeting the God who loved her and whom she dearly loved. How joyous that moment! How wonderful the reunion with her parents, deceased siblings, Mary Frances Clarke and all her deceased BVM sisters! Surely, her smile has never been brighter!