



Eulogy of Sister Ramona Barwick, BVM (Simone)

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Nov. 8, 2022

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Ramona Barwick.

Ramona Elaine Barwick was born Jan. 30, 1931, in Milwaukee. She was the only child of Frank and Lillian (Ossowski) Barwick. Her father, who worked in sales, was born in Wisconsin to parents of German-Polish descent; her mother was born in Poland.

Ramona entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1949, after graduating from Holy Angels Academy in Milwaukee. She commented, "I just knew I had to go to Mount Carmel. I knew that my freshman year." Ramona entered with three other graduates from Holy Angels, including Ann Ellen Quirk. She received the name Simone at her reception on March 19, 1950, and professed first vows on March 19, 1952. Ramona lived 73 years as BVM.

After profession, Ramona was missioned to St. Thomas of Canterbury in Chicago to teach elementary classes for the remainder of the school year. She spent the summer there working as a housekeeper and cook for visitors and companioning the superior, SM Norbertus Powers, as needed. In August 1952, she was transferred to St. Anthony Elementary School in Davenport, Iowa, to teach third and fourth grades while residing at Immaculate Conception Academy. She was grateful to Sister Patricia (Casia) Galhouse who helped her keep order. After four years, she was sent to St. Patrick in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Ramona commented, "I don't remember anything about this year except that our superior was great on serving leftover meals."

Prior to final vows, Ramona met with Mother Mary Consolatrice (Helen Wright), who had been her postulant mistress, and asked to be released from teaching. "I grew up as an only child, so I was unaccustomed to young children," she explained. After she professed final vows on July 16, 1957, Mother Consolatrice assigned her to Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa. She began her tenure at Clarke the same year as SM Benedict Phelan, BVM began her service as President. Initially she "took on a number of different jobs" among which was working in food service. In short order, she became the food service coordinator for the next 13 years. It was a fitting position for a woman who is widely acclaimed for her gourmet talents.

During this time, Ramona earned a bachelor's degree in the natural sciences from Clarke. She also assisted the post mistress SM Rachel Eppel and the bookstore manager SM Stephen O'Brien. Ramona became the Clarke bookstore manager in 1970 after SM Stephen suffered a stroke. "I started attending classes on bookstore management and met some very wonderful and helpful people." Post office duties were added to her responsibilities in 1983. Reflecting on her varied roles she described herself as "self-taught and trained," adding "I had a lot of common sense."

During Ramona's tenure in the bookstore, she recalled that her father—the salesman—asked her if she'd like to run the bookstore. Years later she acknowledged "I liked selling. I like people." She consistently maintained a single goal: I aimed to make the best bookstore I could."

Clarke's bookstore moved from the lower level of Mary Josita Hall to the Atrium and most recently to the Kehl Center. She recounted that "somewhere during that time I was retired twice with cake and colleagues." Her first retirement was in 1997 after 27 years of service during which she earned the name "Sister Mary Bookstore." She

“retired” from the post office in 2003 but continued to share her postal services skills as a volunteer. “I joke about my third retirement,” she said. “I’ve been very happy here (at Clarke) all along. I plan to volunteer as long as they’ll have me.” A colleague commented, “I don’t know what we’d do without her; she’s a staple here, full of knowledge, and more loyal and faithful to her job than many paid employees are.” Unfortunately, health issues forced her to move to Mount Carmel in 2019.

Ramona served the Clarke community for an astonishing 62 years joining only three other people, all BVMs, who served at Clarke for 60 or more years. “God wanted me to be here,” she commented. “I’ve lived in all the original buildings. I think that was His way of giving me a new perspective and a chance to meet new people. I’ve also had the privilege of traveling to see other sisters and around the world. I have been very blessed.”

Recognizing Ramona’s 61 years of service, Associate Norm Freund wrote: “Teachers and administrators are essential for education, but far from sufficient. All manners of behind-the-scenes work are needed as well. There is food to be purchased, prepared, and served. Books to be ordered, unpacked, shelved, and sold. Mail to be sent off, received, and delivered. That service and spirit of BVM [founding member,] Rose O’Toole, is [witnessed by Ramona.]”

To quote a 2016 article in *Salt*, Ramona was “a compendium of Clarke history and BVM stories which she readily shared not only as education but as entertainment . . . She formed countless significant relationships with a wide variety of people. . . She maintained a close friendship with a woman who for years made daily UPS deliveries at Clarke. Graduate students from around the country search her out when they visit, always grateful for her engaged listening and support.” Ramona even served as a live patient twice weekly for physical therapy students.

In reflecting on St. Paul’s greeting to the Philippians, Ramona’s generosity and service reveal her “partnership in gospel” living. Her approach to life was simple. “I never quit. . . I followed the Spirit in big decisions and used common sense in the little ones.” She was able to “discern what is of value” in this life. She believed that the “Spirit prepares us and teaches us to be compassionate to one another” and “hoped that the students would remember that God loves them.” Today we are grateful for the treasure Ramona been to us and rejoice in the love of God reflected in her gracious presence among us.