



## **Eulogy of Sister Bernadette Marie Schvach, BVM (David Ann)**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Nov.17, 2022

Good morning and welcome. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Bernadette Marie Schvach.

Bernadette Josephine Schvach was born in Chicago on May 1, 1930, weighing just two pounds. The Schvach housekeeper wrapped her in oil and cotton and placed her in a small box, commenting that she would live because “her fingernails were hard.” And she did live.

Bernadette’s parents, Joseph and Mary (Zemanek) Schvach, were born in Czechoslovakia. Her mother, one of twelve children, four of whom died young, immigrated to the United States as a young adult. Although she never returned to visit her family, she corresponded frequently with a sister. Bernadette’s father was one of five children. He, too, came to America as a young adult. However, little is known about his family since he never kept in contact with relatives in the old country. Bernadette joined siblings George and Evelyn with their younger brother Joseph completing the family.

Bernadette attended Blessed Agnes Grade School where she was taught by Franciscan sisters and graduated from St. Mary High School where she met the BVMs. She felt called to religious life early in her grade school years. “I had intended to be a Franciscan sister,” wrote Bernadette. “Not being allowed to enter the convent after grammar school, I went to St. Mary’s where I met SM Ignacio Walsh. . . I told her my future plans and she said, ‘You don’t want to be a Franciscan.’ And so, my mind was easily changed.”

Bernadette entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1948, becoming a member of the “Carefree Little Birds” set, a name attributed to a song they sang in their early days at Mount Carmel. Regarding Bernadette, a set member commented, “We always referred to her as our leader because she led the set as one of its shortest members.” Bernadette received the name David Ann upon her reception on March 19, 1949. She professed first vows on March 19, 1951, and lived 74 years as a BVM.

Bernadette earned a bachelor’s degree in history from Mundelein College, Chicago, in 1968, and a master’s degree as a reading specialist from Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, in 1975.

She ministered as an elementary teacher for 60 years with missions at Sacred Heart in Boulder, Colo.; St. Ambrose in Des Moines, Iowa; Our Lady of Lourdes in Chicago; St. Catherine and Holy Cross on the island of Kaua`i, Hawaii; and St. Odilo in Berwyn, Ill., where she taught for 43 years. She served as principal and superior at Holy Cross on the island of Kaua`i and was tasked with closing the mission in 1969. She was an assistant principal and coordinator of reading, testing, and tutoring programs at St. Odilo in Berwyn.

An excellent and innovative teacher, in 1986, Bernadette received the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Teacher Merit Award, created by U.S Representative from Illinois William O. Lipinski. This award was given to teachers who promote academic excellence by example and instruction, exhibit enthusiasm for the teaching profession, go beyond their normal duties to help students, and instill in them a sense of school spirit and pride. Bernadette was also honored with the Archdiocese of Chicago Heart of the School Award for outstanding contribution to the lives of students. The St. Odilo school newspaper stated, “We are very proud of Sister Bernadette here at St. Odilo School. She is always

using her creative ideas to stimulate the enthusiasm of her students. Sister Bernadette expects the best and works hard with the children to help them achieve their potential.”

She taught religious education classes and served as lector and Eucharistic minister for the parishes in which she lived. Here, too, Bernadette’s artistic side found expression. She created antependia and banners for liturgical celebrations, decorations for a variety of parish activities, and even decorated cakes. She shared, “Aside from teaching, I have always been interested in crafts of all kinds. There is no specialty . . . just anything that my hands get into.” Her crafting included sweatshirts, wreaths, dolls, and jewelry and she shared her passion by teaching crafting to senior citizens. When Bernadette retired to the Mount Carmel, she taught cardmaking classes at the Roberta Kuhl Center and she became a faithful member of the Cut Ups, making creative party favors for birthday celebrations. She also enjoyed cooking and baking for her BVM sisters.

In 1986, Bernadette was blessed with the opportunity of a Third World experience in India. There she assisted a teacher at a boarding school for boys by giving art and reading workshops using any available reading materials such as old magazines and newspapers. “To see their classrooms, with nothing but chalkboards, [that] became their sleeping quarters at night made [me] realize how much [we] have. . . My most satisfying experience was meeting an elderly group of lepers . . . [They] were so grateful for the presence and touch of visitors . . . Even with missing fingers and toes, they stood tall to have their pictures taken. They appreciated having someone there even though [we] were unable to speak the language. . . That summer made me re-evaluate my priorities . . . The long suffering of these people, their patient struggle for daily survival, their lack of comfort, their community spirit and openness to welcome strangers has left an impression that will not soon be forgotten.”

As a teacher, Bernadette simply wanted her students to know they are loved and hoped to instill “qualities that the children would follow in their life to become better people.” Bernadette said, “That’s what I wanted most in them – to be good to each other but most of all that they would become good persons.” John the Evangelist wrote, “See what love the Father has bestowed on us in letting us be called children of God! Yet that in fact is what we are. . . Dearly beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall later be, has not yet come to light.” (1 John 3:1-2).

Seeing a beloved child of God in every person, Bernadette strove to be a loving presence to all she encountered. She had a gentle strength and a joyfulness born from a deep faith and trust in God. She was by nature a caring and sharing person, a loyal and dependable friend, and “a breath of fresh air.” For Bernadette “what [she] shall later be” has indeed come to pass. She now knows the abundance of God’s blessing, the fullness of eternal life and “sees Jesus Christ as he is” face to face.