



Eulogy of Sister Mary Jo Keane, BVM (Martin Mary)

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 5, 2023

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Mary Jo Keane.

Mary Josephine Keane was born in Chicago on Sept. 6, 1934, the first child of Martin and Catherine (Rowland) Keane. She was only three months old when her father died. Her mother eventually married Thomas Hoban and together they had two daughters Catherine "Kay" and Patricia.

Mary Jo attended St. Jerome Grade School and graduated from The Immaculata in 1952. For the next several years, she worked in a variety of office and secretarial positions while attending evening classes at Northwestern University. She entered the congregation on August 2, 1959, following in the footsteps of her cousin Theresa Kane. She received the name Martin Mary at her reception on February 3, 1960. She professed first vows on February 2, 1962, final vows on July 16, 1967, and lived 63 years as a BVM.

Mary Jo's first assignment was to assist Sister Mary Josine Brabec in the Office of the Treasurer. Mary Jo shared, "[Josine] had been principal at Immaculata when I was a student and was loved . . . for her gentleness and sense of humor. . . I was very fortunate to have worked with her [and] to know her as a friend."

Beginning in 1964, Mary Jo studied at the Scholasticate in Chicago and then at Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa, where she completed a bachelor's degree in economics with a minor in history. Her first teaching mission was a few months at Bellarmine-Jefferson High School in Burbank, California. This was followed by a short time as business manager at Los Gatos and office manager for the Guadalupe Project in California.

Mary Jo moved to St. Louis, Missouri in 1967 to teach business education and history at Xavier High School while completing a master's degree in history with minors in political science and sociology from Indiana University-Bloomington. "I always liked to teach in a provocative manner," she commented. "I think it is very effective in keeping the students on their toes. I liked taking them on field trips, mostly to cemeteries. You would be surprised how much you can learn in a cemetery."

While teaching at Xavier, Mary Jo moderated the Black Identification and Cultural Society (BICS), the first club for black students in the history of the school. "[The students] just wanted a place where they could all be together. . . to explore their culture in a setting where they didn't feel judged. . . I felt like I really delved into black culture with BICS. I felt like I was really part of their lives."

Mary Jo moved back to Chicago in 1971 when her mother became ill. Besides caring for her mother, she taught U.S. history and sociology at The Immaculata. There she encountered the challenges of teaching in a big city with illiteracy posing a significant problem among her black students. She adapted by arranging field trips to museums and the historical society to supplement textbooks and using oral reports and creative projects as alternative methods of evaluation.

"I get bored pretty easily," Mary Jo confessed. "That's why I kept going back to school to earn more degrees." After five years at Immaculata, she became a full-time student at Mundelein College where she completed a master's degree in religious studies. Afterwards, she taught religious studies and U.S. history at The Academy of the Sacred Heart and Mount Carmel High School, both in Chicago.

She assumed the role of student one more time to earn a master's degree in social work from the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois-Chicago. She ministered as a clinical social worker in the Chicago Public Schools for 13 years. "I saw firsthand what happens to kids who live in ghetto situations in Chicago. They live in such a depressive atmosphere. I didn't blame them for acting out in school. . . I perfected my skills getting kids to talk to me . . . I figured out that if you play games, they will tell you anything. My main goal was to put them at ease so they would not be afraid to seek help in the future." For this purpose, Mary Jo started the Friendship Group program. Groups of boys or girls would meet for fun activities that provided them with an opportunity to talk with each other and Mary Jo about the happenings in their lives.

Mary Jo traveled all over Europe and Asia, including multiple trips to Ireland, her parents' ancestral home. She participated in several educational tours in the 1980s, including a trip to Nicaragua to explore the political implications of the revolution and two trips to the Soviet Union to study the impact of religion on the peace movement. Her intense interest in 20th century history, especially World War II, made an educational tour of Japan a must. She became fascinated by the Japanese culture. Her favorite tour was to Israel. "It was amazing to see all the places that were so important in the Bible," she commented. "We did a walking tour of Scripture. I could imagine that I was really there; it was intense and interesting."

Besides her early years in the Treasurer's Office, Mary Jo's congregational service includes 20 years as chair and/or worker in the office pool for BVM Senates. She also served two years on the Shareholder Education and Advocacy Group (SEA) where her top issues of concern were climate change and drug prices.

Mary Jo enjoyed a variety of activities including cycling, cross-country skiing, hiking as well as the less strenuous activities of reading, eating ice cream, attending the symphony, and exploring her genealogy. She was close to her family and was absolutely thrilled to celebrate a family wedding in Arizona last summer.

Mary Jo volunteered for numerous organizations including Sarah's Circle, Ignatian Services and Lighthouse for the Blind. Near and dear to her heart was the time she spent as a reader at Misericordia, a care community for persons with mild to profound developmental disabilities. She soon discovered that the residents could "speak" with their eyes. "Some have extremely happy personalities. . . I feel a joy and spirituality in each of [them]. . . There is a glint in their eyes some days that I could not mistake for anything but the presence of God." She found deep fulfillment in her ministry at Misericordia.

For her funeral gospel, Mary Jo selected an adaptation of "The Magnificat." In the past 20 years, she experienced several serious health problems that were, at the very least, life-altering. She faced these painful challenges with feisty determination, tremendous courage, an unflinching trust in God, and a deep gratitude for blessings bestowed as she prayed, "My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior. . . For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me, and holy is your Name." (Luke 1: 46-47, 49, *A Contemporary Celtic Prayer Book* by W. J. Fitzgerald). Despite difficulties, Mary Jo knew great joy in her 88 years of life. How unimaginable her joy in heaven!