



Eulogy of Sister Eleanor Craggs, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, April 4, 2024

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Eleanor Craggs.

Beverly Marie Craggs was born April 22, 1922, in Chicago, the only child of William and Eleanor (Bittner) Craggs. She was baptized at the age of two in a Methodist Episcopal church where her paternal grandmother was a parishioner. Her family moved to Highland Park, Ill., when she was four. It was there that she grew to love the outdoors and nature. She loved school and learning from the beginning; she continued to do so throughout her life both as a student and a teacher.

Beverly wrote, "[My parents] were good parents. . . I was always grateful for the music lessons, the summers at camp, and our trips together." Her father worked as a stockbroker during the 1929 crash. Eventually the family lost their home and moved into an apartment in Skokie, Ill. Beverly attended the Skokie public school. With only six girls in her class, all girls, regardless of athleticism, were "required" to play sports. "I was a tall and rather gangly thirteen-year-old who was the center on the basketball team and second baseman on the softball team. . . I was better at the standing broad jump. Long legs helped!"

Beverly was a freshman in high school when she suffered the devastating loss of her father due to a heart condition. After his death, Beverly and her mother moved into the Knickerbocker Hotel in downtown Chicago. Her mother was hired as part of the promotional staff at the hotel.

Jesus said to his disciples, "You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last." (John 15:16). As Beverly faced the challenges of life without her father, God's call to a religious vocation was beginning to unfold.

At the urging of several women on the hotel staff, Beverly's mother sent her to The Immaculata for her sophomore year of high school. "As a Protestant who had usually gone to Sunday School, I was a bit apprehensive about attending a Catholic school. I had never talked to or even been near a nun. However, on the first day everyone seemed friendly, and I look back now and realize that my days at Immaculata were some of the happiest in my life. I grew to love the Sisters and admired them for their obvious love of God and their devotion to their students."

Although Eleanor did not take religion class, she was present in the room while it was being taught. Soon she had many questions about Catholicism and felt a need to defend her Protestant faith. As a freshman at Mundelein College, she took an apologetics class and slowly the pieces started coming together. She found herself stopping frequently to pray at Holy Name Cathedral, not at her Protestant church. At age 19, she joined the Catholic Church with the future BVM Sister Coletta Stanton (St. Denis) as one of her sponsors.

Beverly recalled, "At Mundelein I joined a [Catholic youth] group, attended Mass daily and was, and still am, awestruck at Jesus' tremendous gift of Himself in the form of bread. I felt compelled to do something more to devote myself to this God who had given me so much." Beverly entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1943, and

received the name Eleanor at her reception on March 19, 1944. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1946, and lived 80 years as a BVM.

Eleanor was a California girl, living and working there for all 50 years of her active ministry. She briefly taught fifth grade at St. Philip in Pasadena. In her words: "I was a disaster. Perhaps it was symbolic that I began my first day of teaching on April Fool's Day. My principal taught in the room below mine and one day she appeared at my curtain (there were no doors) and handed me a paper airplane and said kindly, 'I thought you'd want to know that this floated in my classroom window just below.' The first day every student got lunch at the same time. Chaos!! But I learned fast and by September my lines were straight, and I had developed an eagle eye for activity that wasn't class work."

Except for this initial teaching experience and a few months at St. Leo Elementary School in San Jose in 1966, Eleanor ministered in secondary education with teaching missions at Holy Family in Glendale and Bishop Garcia in Santa Barbara. She served as superior/principal at St. Paul High School in San Francisco and as vice-principal and development director at Holy Family in Glendale. "My life as a teacher was a happy one. I loved my teenage girls and learned much from them. They have been a gift to me."

Eleanor was sent to Guadalupe College in Los Gatos to serve as postulant mistress when it opened in 1964. She commented, "Other than a few lines in the Rule Book, there didn't seem to be a great job description. Relying on God and experience I tried to help young women make the initial transition to religious life. I loved Guadalupe . . . The Spirit of God pervaded Guadalupe. It was a holy place; it was a beautiful place, as were the young women who came to make a commitment to God. I learned from them more, I am sure, than they learned from me."

For a postulant's point of view, Sister Kathy Carr wrote, "Eleanor was very caring, had a good sense of humor, and was flexible with us. This was a time of 'change' in formation techniques. One thought at the time was to let postulants 'grow into' the need for silence, rather than imposing it from the beginning. Alas, our group was quite extroverted, and eventually we had to be given more direct guidance on this matter! But Sister Eleanor handled our boisterous ways with great calm and patience."

Eleanor moved to Dubuque in 1996 and volunteered as secretary for the Motherhouse administrative team. In later years, she also volunteered at the BVM Center reception desk. Eleanor shared, "It was quite a change, but I loved the place and the people. Everyone was gracious and welcoming. BVMs are that way wherever they are. I thank God and the congregation for all the blessings that have been mine . . . All in all, it has been a wonderful life."

We, too, thank God for our hearts are filled with gratitude and love for the gift of Eleanor in our lives, our community. We can only begin to imagine her great joy celebrating this Easter in the presence of our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Alleluia! Alleluia!