



Eulogy of Sister Suzanne (Carmelita) Stopper, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 15, 2024

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Suzanne Stopper, BVM.

Suzanne Helen Stopper was born Feb. 13, 1927, in Detroit, joining older brothers John "Jack" and Edward. Her parents George and Pearl (Bertin) Stopper were born in Williamsport, Pa., but had moved to Detroit after their marriage in 1923. Soon after Suzanne's birth, the Stoppers moved to the Los Angeles area where Mary Jeanne, William "Bill," and Elizabeth "Betsy" were born. The Stoppers moved to Glendale, Calif., in 1936, and became members of the Holy Family Parish. All the children attended Holy Family ES and the girls attended Holy Family HS. From early on, the Stoppers were a musical family. Her father played the ukulele, Suzanne the piano, the boys string instruments, and Mary Jeanne sang.

After graduating from Holy Family HS in 1944, Suzanne attended Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles for two years while working summers in a bookstore. She entered the BVM congregation Sept. 8, 1946; received the name Carmelita on March 19, 1947; professed first vows on March 19, 1949; and lived 77 years as a BVM.

Her sister Mary Jeanne (John Edward) entered the congregation in 1949. Their brother Edward became a De La Salle Brother. He was known as an artist who excelled in making stained glass windows. With religious vocations so prevalent in the Stopper family, brother Jack shocked everyone by announcing his engagement around the same time Mary Jeanne entered the Congregation.

In 1951, Suzanne completed a bachelor's degree in English with a music minor from Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa. She earned a master's degree in English from Loyola University in Los Angeles in 1968.

Suzanne ministered as an elementary teacher at Annunciation in Chicago; Annunciation in Kansas City, Mo.; and St. Matthew in Phoenix. She taught high school English and served as Glee Club moderator at Santa Barbara Catholic HS in Santa Barbara, Calif. The school was renamed Bishop Garcia Diego the following year.

Soon after, she moved to Bellarmine-Jefferson HS in Burbank, Calif. and then to Holy Family in Glendale, Calif. where she taught English and served as yearbook advisor. Suzanne commented, "[Mary Jeanne and I] have come full circle! After graduation from Holy Family HS in Glendale, we have both returned to our alma mater where we teach English to freshman, sophomore, and junior girls. . . We are proud to be members of the religious community who founded [our beloved] Holy Family HS."

Sadly, Suzanne's mother died of cancer in 1962; while her father died in 1989 living to the ripe old age of 101. For fifteen years he lived in an apartment across the street from the Holy Family Convent and opened the Holy Family Church every morning at 5:15 a.m. Mary Jeanne wrote, "Because Suzanne and I lived so near [at the time], we were able to take care of him in his declining years, which made it possible for him to live and die in his own home."

Sharing a love of English was one of the few things Suzanne and Mary Jeanne had in common, as Suzanne wrote, "Mary Jeanne and I are different in more ways than we are alike . . . She is a redhead, and I am a brunette; she is tall, and I am short; she is immediately sociable in a group, I tend to be reticent at first." They had more

than a little fun through the years convincing new acquaintances that they were not only religious sisters, but sister sisters. Both would admit that it was nice to live with a blood sister who was a readily available and eager travel companion, especially on trips to see relatives. They appreciated their sibling's loyalty, interest, understanding, and the subtle ways of communicating often overlooked by others.

Suzanne's passion for helping students earned her the distinction of Glendale Lions Club Educator of the Year in 1996. Her students commented that she made learning fun by getting everyone involved such as acting out scenes from plays and books. After retiring from teaching in 2003, she volunteered as an office assistant for the high school and continued to serve as lector coordinator at the parish. She devoted over 60 years of her life to the Holy Family Parish and High School.

As an ardent supporter of Catholic education, Suzanne wrote, "Catholic schools deserve not only to survive but to thrive. They are the training grounds for the U. S. Catholic leaders of tomorrow. They provide an atmosphere where moral values are evident . . . They teach the student[s] to respect [their] dignity as loved child[ren] of God. . . I am grateful to be a part of the world of the Catholic school."

One of Suzanne's favorite leisure activities was reading. Despite the onset of macular degeneration, she claimed to have read more books after retiring than during her entire teaching career. She enjoyed plays and movies, especially movie versions of the classics. Spending time with family and in nature was also important. For decades, the Stopper family traveled each summer to Huntington Lake in the Sierra Mountains above Fresno, Calif. for their family reunions. She and Mary Jeanne also enjoyed visiting their sister Betsy and her family in Idaho, calling the trip "a thrill!" Suzanne loved the beauty of the state and its connection with the Lewis and Clark Expedition, since these explorers were two of her favorite people in history. And lest we forget, she took great pleasure in celebrating the annual National Left Handers Day on August 13.

In 2012, Suzanne, Mary Jeanne, and seven other BVMs moved to Holy Redeemer Convent in Montrose, Calif., when Holy Family Convent closed. Mary Jeanne moved to Mount Carmel in August 2019 and a little over a year ago, Suzanne joined her in January 2023. While Suzanne lived here at Mount Carmel Bluffs for a comparatively brief time, her infectious smile and exuberant spirit left her mark on her sisters and certainly the staff. Her presence was a special gift that we will continue to celebrate and treasure.

St. Paul wrote, "Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3: 15-17) Suzanne shared, "I am deeply grateful for the countless blessings God bestowed on me from birth to death through my family, the Church, my BVM vocation, my friends . . . and especially through my years as a BVM teacher."

We too express our gratitude for the gift of Suzanne in our lives. Whatever she did in word or in deed, she did everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God through Him. We rejoice with confidence that Jesus welcomed Suzanne into His loving arms with the words, "'Well done, my good and faithful servant.' You have served me well."