



Eulogy of Sister Suzanne (Francs Carol) Effinger, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Dec. 19, 2024

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

Suzanne Therese Effinger was born June 24, 1932, in Milwaukee, the youngest child of Frank and Frances (Reichert) Effinger, both Milwaukee natives. Her father worked in advertising while her mother managed the home. Sue joined siblings James and Janet, who were twins, Thomas, Mary Ann, David, and John, all of whom preceded her in death.

Sue first met the BVMs when they taught her in first and second grade at Holy Rosary ES. However, it was the Depression, and businesses were not purchasing advertisements. Her father had to sell their house and rent a house within the larger St. Sebastian parish, where Sue completed her elementary education. It was a huge adjustment, but something wonderful came from the move. One of the first people Sue met was Mary Ellen Zimmermann and they have been friends for 84 years.

Outside of school, the neighborhood was the center of their lives. Summers were spent at the beach or at the pool and on the front porch. Sue was often called "a fish" because she loved the water and was an excellent swimmer. Winters were spent ice skating and tobogganing. But Christmas was a sad time with two brothers, Tom and Dave, serving in the army overseas.

In 1946, Sue renewed her acquaintance with the BVMs at Holy Angels Academy. "I realized what a great group the BVMs were. I could tell they were happy, and they were fun. That just appealed to me. I didn't even consider any other congregation."

Sue entered the community on Sept. 8, 1950, from St. Sebastian parish in Milwaukee. The other women who joined that day bonded immediately. "I can still see us sitting around [on the Mount Carmel Motherhouse grounds]. "We spent a lot of time outside just getting acquainted. We were close from the start, and we kept that up through the years."

Sue received the name Frances Carol upon her reception on March 19, 1951, professed first vows on March 19, 1953, and lived 74 years as a BVM. At the time of her Diamond Jubilee, Sue shared with a laugh, "I never even gave it a thought that I was going to teach. I was just entering religious life because I wanted to be sure I got into heaven."

Sue's first mission was as an elementary teacher at Incarnation in Glendale, Calif. "I was excited about going to California. It was a place I had I had never been, a place only in dreams." She loved Incarnation, but her provincial wanted her to have a different experience before professing final vows.

Sue was sent to Presentation ES in Chicago to teach kindergarten. It was 1955, the time of the second phase of the Great Migration when many African Americans traveled north to find work and a good education for their children. It was the beginning of Sue's ministry to the Black community which continued in Chicago at St. Dorothy as a teacher and at Holy Cross as a principal during the seventies, and then in Milwaukee in the nineties. Sue commented, "These experiences taught me about the Black culture, their needs, their history and the impact this history had on their current lives."

Sue also taught at St. Timothy in St. Louis; St. Therese in Kansas City, Mo.; and St. Joseph in Round Lake, Ill. She quickly discovered a special affinity for first grade. "They learn so much. They are so open and in wonder about school. Everything is new for them. Teaching first grade was very satisfying." She also served as an assistant principal at Lake Shore Catholic Academy in Waukegan, Ill., and principal at St. Catherine in Kansas City, Mo.; St. Dorothy in Chicago; and St. Joseph in Round Lake, Ill.

After working in elementary education for 40 years, Sue was ready to pursue a new ministry. She attended a BVM gathering called *Dreamers' Workshop* that explored transformation ministry. "You go into a place where there aren't any sisters, find out what they want or need, and try to meet those needs," Sue explained. "A group of BVMs would come together, live together, and minister together. That appealed to me at that time because I needed more community."

In 1994, Sue joined Helen Gourlay and Barbara Kutchera as a literacy instructor at the Adult Learning Center sponsored by the Central City Catholic Parishes in Milwaukee. Her teaching skills transferred easily to adult students. While the content was different from teaching first graders to read, the concepts were the same. She loved the look of wonder that her first graders had when they first learned to read. Now she saw that same look on the faces of her adult students who had had little opportunity for education earlier in life.

Eventually, Sue became the coordinator of the literacy program with the responsibility of training other volunteers. She was instrumental in the establishment of a basic literacy program at Repairers of the Breach, a day center for homeless and at-risk people. In the fall of 2001, she received the Spirit Award from the Greater Milwaukee Literacy Coalition. This award recognizes someone who embodies the spirit of literacy in the community. From the prophet Isaiah, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, buy grain and eat; Come, buy grain without money, wine and milk without cost!" (Isaiah 55:1). For almost 20 years, Sue dedicated her life to improving adult literacy in the Milwaukee area, feeding those hungry for a better life, and quenching those thirsting for knowledge.

During her last three years in Milwaukee, Sue volunteered with Allay Hospice. Back problems necessitated her move to Mount Carmel in 2018. She joined the Sisters Development Network, which keeps donors informed about the latest news at Mount Carmel and offers prayers and support. "I wanted to help somewhere. However, with a bad back I couldn't walk around much. Writing was perfect. I have enjoyed getting to know these great people." Sue also visited the sick and sat with the dying.

Sue's decision to become a BVM gave meaning to her life. She greatly appreciated what she learned from the BVMs. "Gratitude has filled my heart and my thoughts. We have an extraordinary congregation of women who have indeed been touched by God's steadfast love. These are women who are not afraid to share and give that love. . . BVMs are my life."

How wonderful that Sue will spend this Christmas reunited with her parents, siblings, and friends, Mary Frances Clarke and all our deceased BVM sisters in the presence of Jesus our joy!