



Eulogy of Sister Mary Jeanne (John Edward) Stopper, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Jan. 22, 2025

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

Mary Jeanne's parents George and Pearl (Bertin) Stopper were born in Williamsport, Pa. They moved to Detroit after their marriage in 1923 where Mary Jeanne's older siblings John "Jack," Edward and Suzanne were born. Soon after Suzanne's birth, the Stoppers moved to the Los Angeles area where Mary Jeanne Elizabeth was born May 5, 1931. Siblings William "Bill" and Elizabeth "Betsy" completed the family. The Stoppers moved to Glendale, Calif., in 1936, and were members of Holy Family Parish. All the children attended Holy Family Grade School, and the girls attended Holy Family High School.

Mary Jeanne's father lost an eye while fighting in World War I. After the war, he became a mechanic while her mother was a busy and dedicated mother and homemaker. The Stoppers were a musical family. George played the ukulele, Suzanne the piano, the boys string instruments, and Mary Jeanne sang. Her mother died of cancer in 1962 and her father in 1989 at the age of 101. For fifteen years he had 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. George, Suzanne, and Mary Jeanne, along with an aunt and an uncle, would go out for breakfast after Mass every Sunday. 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. This proximity made it possible for him to live and die in his own apartment."

During her high school years, Mary Jeanne had long, curly red hair, likely the envy of more than a few girls. She was active in the Sodality of Our Lady. Since hers was the Class of '49, the students traveled together to the California state capital in Sacramento to honor the 49ers of the gold rush days.

Mary Jeanne entered the BVM congregation on Sept. 8, 1949, joining her sister Suzanne (SM Carmelita) who entered the BVM congregation three years earlier. Their brother Edward also answered the call to consecrated life becoming a Christian Brother. He was known as an artist who excelled in making stained glass windows. Mary Jeanne received the name John Edward at her reception on March 19, 1950; professed first vows on March 19, 1952; and lived 75 years as a BVM.

Mary Jeanne's first mission was teaching third grade at Presentation in Chicago. While she was very happy for the year she was there, returning to Southern California was wonderful. She was missioned at St. Robert Bellarmine in Burbank, Calif., where she had the opportunity to teach each grade from third through eighth during her ten years there. She taught junior high classes at St. Agnes and St. Francis Xavier, both in Phoenix, and at St. Charles in North Hollywood, Calif., where she also served as principal for seven years.

In 1981, Mary Jeanne joined the teaching staff at Holy Family in Glendale, Calif. Her sister Suzanne commented, "[Mary Jeanne and I] have come full circle! After graduation from Holy Family High School in Glendale, we have both returned to our Alma Mater where we teach English to freshman, sophomore, and junior girls." Mary Jeanne was an excellent teacher who diligently prepared her lessons and attended all school activities. Her students enjoyed her because she was gentle, but direct, fun, and easily teased. Of course, they could never forget her wonderful smile.

Mary Jeanne was the last BVM teacher at Holy Family High School, retiring in 2005, after 24 years. After enjoying a sabbatical, she returned to Holy Family as a volunteer tutor and office aide. When at home during her retirement years, she was quick to answer the door, greeting visitors and inviting them in with her most welcoming smile and gracious hospitality. In 2012, Mary Jeanne, Suzanne, and seven other BVMs moved from the Holy Family Convent to Holy Redeemer Convent in Montrose, Calif.

Family was as important to Mary Jeanne as it was for Suzanne. Every summer for decades, the Stopper family enjoyed a week-long reunion at the Christian Brothers camp at Huntington Lake in the Sierra Mountains above Fresno, Calif. Mary Jeanne and Suzanne loved this time with their siblings, nieces, and nephews. The musical talent of the Stopper family did not end with the siblings but was passed on to the next generation. Every year during the reunion, members of the family gathered to perform on the dock. Both Mary Jeanne and Suzanne proudly talked about this event, always praising their talented nieces and nephews. Mary Jeanne and Suzanne also enjoyed visiting their sister Betsy and her family in Idaho.

Mary Jeanne did not travel often, but when she did her trips were special. To celebrate their golden jubilees, Mary Jeanne, from the Set of 1949, Mary Kay Dum, from the Set of 1951 and Mary Jean Ferry, from the Set of 1952, pooled their gift money for a trip to Ireland, inviting Roberta White along as the driver. They longed to see the homeland of our BVM founders, especially the location of Miss Clarke's Seminary. Mary Jeanne and Roberta also traveled to Rome with a tour group that catered to women religious and priests.

Playing cards was among Mary Jeanne's favorite activities. She and Suzanne would meet regularly with their sister-in-law Tomalu "Tommie" for cards and lunch. She played Kings Corner with Sister Janice Link after both moved to Mount Carmel in 2018. She also learned how to play the German card game Gaigel that appears to have grown in popularity among the BVMs in recent years.

At her Diamond Jubilee in 2019, Mary Jeanne shared, "I treasure being a BVM. I have been privileged to live with sisters who all have the same values and goals. I especially enjoyed helping students learn and grow. I cannot believe 70 years have passed so fast!"

St. Paul wrote, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the [Christ] your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:57-58).

Mary Jeanne was truly a very special person – kind, accepting, outgoing, joyful, and very engaged in life happening around her and the ministry to which she was called. She loved her family, was dedicated to her students, remained faithful to her beloved BVM community and to God.

Her labor was not in vain, for now she is welcomed home by her parents, siblings, BVM sisters, friends, and her loving God. Where, as our closing hymn states: "joyful music leads [her] sunward, in the triumphant song of life." Once again, the Stopper Family Band is united as they joyfully celebrate our God of glory for all eternity.