



Eulogy of Sister Donna (Blanche) Schauf, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 16, 2025

Good morning and welcome. It is good to be together to celebrate of life of our Sister Donna Schauf.

Donna Gay Schauf was born in Wichita, Kans., on July 25, 1937, to Walter and Ethel Rose (Somerhouser) Schauf. She was the eldest of four children and was later joined by siblings Gerry, Sherry, and Thomas. Her brother Gerry died at twenty-two months of age in 1940. Her sister Sherry arrived in 1942. Donna recalled, "I was so proud to hold her in my little rocker and tell everyone in kindergarten about my new little sister." Thomas' arrival in 1944 completed the family. Donna was also surrounded by an extended family which included three living grandparents and 10 aunts and uncles. "I had a happy childhood with much love from all my relatives . . . We did not have a lot of money but always had what we needed."

Donna attended public kindergarten followed by eight years at St. Joseph ES in Wichita. "My grade school years provided me with many happy memories of friends, singing in the choir and glee club, school plays, dances and a small sextet I sang with sometimes. . . Mount Carmel Academy was where I spent four enjoyable years [as the] BVMs introduced me to deeper spirituality." Donna worked during her high school years as a nurse aide at Wichita Hospital and as an elevator operator at a department store. These experiences taught her about work, responsibility, and money management.

Donna shared, "[I] believe that [attending BVM schools] was where the seeds of my vocation were planted. . . When I made my [senior retreat], I definitely knew the Lord was calling me to religious life." Donna entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1955; received the name Blanche upon her reception on March 19, 1956; and professed first vows on March 19, 1958. She lived 69 years as a BVM and would have celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in September.

Donna was privileged to be in the second class of Scholastics which allowed her to complete a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in elementary education from Mundelein College in Chicago in 1960. She was missioned as an elementary teacher at St. Callistus in Chicago and Sacred Heart in Boone, Iowa. She spent a year completing a master's degree in elementary education with a minor in early childhood education from the University of Illinois-Urbana. Missions followed at St. Therese Little Flower in Kansas City, Mo., and Sacred Heart and the Corpus Christi Center in Fort Dodge, Iowa, where she also served as principal at Holy Rosary.

In 1983, Donna left the traditional classroom and ventured out to live with the people in David, Ky, a coal mining town in the Appalachian Mountains. "What a blessing to share my education with adults who wanted to read or get their GED, and to receive so much love and acceptance from the folks."

Donna founded and later directed David Preschool, often referred to as "mountain top preschool." She even drove a van to pick up students in the "hollers." Sometimes they had to wait for a train to pass, so she would ask, "What would you like to sing?" "Jingle Bells" was always their response no matter the time of year. Once she said, "Wouldn't it be nice if the van could grow wings and we could fly over the train?" The children laughed as if it was the funniest thing they ever heard. When listening to her reminisce, Donna's love for the students in David was palpable. The incredible work being done at David Preschool was featured in the documentary *Dropping Out*:

What's It Worth. The program's producer commented, "This is amazing. . . David School has been doing for years what community leaders are first bringing to public attention."

In 1988, Donna moved to Steele, Mo., to be closer to her elderly parents. There she partnered with BVMs Mary Frances Reis, Florence Heflin, and Irene Lukefahr to work with the poor through Catholic Bootheel Ministry. They dismissed early comments that they would never be accepted in the area because they were women and Catholic. They simply went to work.

In the first year, the sisters sought to be the presence of the Catholic Church through prayer, hospitality, neighborliness, and collaboration. They tutored students in the schools, volunteered in the health clinics, brought HeadStart to the area and Communion to the homebound, offered spiritual retreats and direction, and participated in the diocesan religious studies program. They learned about the life experiences of the people and discovered their deep faith. The people were friendly and offered wonderful acceptance. The sisters felt very much at home.

The next year, with their ministry flourishing, Mary Frances and Flo opened the Learning Center to prepare adults for GED tests and college entrance exams. Meanwhile, Donna obtained a job with HeadStart as a tutor and a family support aide. Both Donna and Flo were recognized by the Missouri State Treasurer as "Missouri's Best" for "their dedicated service to their neighbors by fostering excellence in education, the presentation of cultural knowledge, and for caring for the aged and underprivileged."

In 1994, Donna started the Senior Citizen Ministry at her home parish of St. Joseph's in Wichita, Kans., and directed it until insufficient funds forced it to be discontinued. She then became the pastoral associate at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, also in Wichita.

During the summer of 1993, Donna entered a ten-week Clinical Pastoral Education program at St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis. She asked to be assigned to floors with the most senior citizens with the hope of going into this ministry full-time. She shared, "Many years [earlier] while volunteering at Mount Carmel, I felt the tug of God to minister to our sisters in some way." Years later, Donna joined the pastoral care team at Mount Carmel, "The next eight years were filled with many graces and blessings. I grew in love of God, others and especially BVM community life with my sisters." After retiring, Donna continued to serve in a variety of volunteer ministries.

When asked what has been most lifegiving as a religious, Donna replied, "My ministry with many cultures and people of different races and economic levels has aided me as I grow in love of others and helped me let others love me in return."

St. Paul directed the Colossians to "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, . . . and over all these put on love. . ." (Colossians 3:12,14). Donna certainly lived a life of love in action. We love you, Donna, and hold you close to our hearts. Rest now in God's love.