



**Eulogy of Sister Edissa Mary Szczepanski, BVM  
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 9, 2025**

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Edissa Mary Szczepanski.

Lorraine Anne Szczepanski was born Dec. 29, 1933, in Chicago, the first child of Edward and Mary (Gdowski) Szczepanski. When she was four years old, much to her displeasure, her brother Edward Anthony was born. She so hoped for a sister! In time, the siblings developed a close relationship. Her maternal grandmother and three bachelor uncles lived nearby and gave extra love to Lorraine and Edward. All three uncles served in World War II and, fortunately, returned home safely.

The nearest Catholic school to the Szczepanski home was St. John Cantius which Lorraine attended through the third grade. Given the distance, Lorraine needed to take a streetcar by herself both to and from school. In time she transferred and completed her elementary education at Our Lady of the Angels and later graduated from St. Mary High School.

Lorraine learned the value of hard work at a young age. By the time she was eleven, her mother had become frail, and the responsibility of the housework fell to Lorraine. At the same time, her father suffered with poor eyesight affecting his ability to work. Despite the resulting financial challenges, Catholic education remained a priority in the Szczepanski family. While in grade school, Lorraine worked summers at the neighborhood drugstore to earn tuition. In high school, she worked at the movie theater concession stand in the evening and at a bank during the summer.

Lorraine entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1952, and received the name Edissa Mary at her reception on March 19, 1953. Later that year her father and brother changed their last name to Stevens for business purposes. At the time, BVMs did not use their last names; consequently, Edissa chose not to change her surname. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1955, and lived 72 years as a BVM. She attributed her vocation to observing the BVMs at Our Lady of the Angels, especially Sister Mary Carolita McMahon, who taught her piano and choir.

Edissa earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Clarke College in 1964 and a Master of Science in Education with majors in library science and communications media from Chicago State University in 1974.

Dedicating 22 years to elementary education, Edissa served in missions at St. Mary, St. Irenaeus, and Our Lady of Angels Academy in Clinton, Iowa; St. Augustine in Memphis, Tenn.; St. Patrick and St. Jude in Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and St. Agatha, St. Tarcissus, Blessed Sacrament, and Our Lady of Angels in Chicago.

St. Augustine in Memphis held a special place in her heart. She was touched by the people she met along the way. "Learning [about] the people and the culture that I had not experienced before is a good memory. . . They were honest and caring people despite how others treated them. They were a good example for everyone."

While in Chicago, Edissa served as librarian at Blessed Sacrament, media center director at The Immaculata, and media library consultant at St. Anthony Hospital. Later she worked as a media specialist at Immaculate Heart of Mary ES in Chicago, St. Eulalia ES in Maywood, Ill., and St. Joseph ES in Downers Grove, Ill.

As a Chicago native, it is not surprising that Edissa's favorite mission was her seven years teaching at Blessed Sacrament school. She particularly enjoyed her time with other BVMs, remarking, "The community was a united, a caring group of sisters who worked well together, whether in school or in convent." She was especially appreciative of the parishioners as they worked together to educate and support the children and their families. Edissa recalled that the sisters at Blessed Sacrament braved many challenges, "[in this] very poor parish, but [it was] a happy place."

While Edissa enjoyed teaching and living at Blessed Sacrament, the mission with the greatest impact on her life was Holy Name in Chicago. She lived at the Holy Name convent for 17 years, working first as secretary and librarian at Holy Name ES and later as administrative assistant at Wright Hall, a BVM retirement facility. There she coordinated car sign-out and housekeeping for every floor in the 10-story building; she often went beyond the call of duty. The location of the Holy Name convent was perfect. She was able to leave on weekends to stay with her family. Since both her mother and sister-in-law were deceased, her father, brother, and his two boys appreciated a woman's touch in their so-called bachelor pad. Edissa retired in 2000, moved to Wright Hall in 2003, and later to Mount Carmel in 2011 when Wright Hall closed.

Given the variety of ministries in which she served, it is clear that Edissa was friendly, generous, hardworking, and adaptable. Even though she was usually rather quiet, she was deeply interested in other people and enjoyed one-on-one conversations. Sewing was one of her favorite hobbies. Above all, she liked to keep busy.

While spending retirement with her sisters at Mount Carmel, Edissa shared that, "being a BVM is a special way of loving and brings joy, peace, and happiness to my heart and to others with whom I interact in my daily life."

At the Last Supper, Jesus said to his Apostles, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be." (John 14:3). After weeks of slow decline, Edissa's wait was finally over. Jesus lovingly wrapped his arms around her and carried her home to a wonderful reunion with her parents, her brother, and all departed loved ones. The loving God whom you have served so well, the Holy One in whom you placed your hope, has been waiting for you and now greets you with great joy and everlasting peace.