



**Eulogy of Sister Veronica “Ronnie” (Rosine), BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, July 9, 2025**

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Veronica “Ronnie” Higgins.

Veronica Anne Higgins was born on Nov. 21, 1945, in Chicago, the youngest child of Joseph and Roseanne (Keenan) Higgins. She joined siblings Bernadette, Pat, Tom and Dan, all of whom preceded her in death.

While growing up, Ronnie enjoyed singing and sports. She was a member of a bowling league, Sodality, Junior League of Mary, Junior Red Cross and Civil Defense. She first started considering a religious vocation during her last year at St. Bartholomew grade school. The inclination only grew through the example and guidance of her BVM teachers at The Immaculata. A retreat with her Senior Sodality was the deciding factor. She applied for admission immediately afterwards.

Ronnie entered the congregation on July 31, 1963, from St. Bartholomew Parish in Chicago. She received the name Rosine upon her reception on Feb. 2, 1964, and professed first vows on Feb. 2, 1966. The day she died, she was exactly three weeks from completing her 62nd year as BVM. After profession, she was sent to the Scholasticate in Chicago to earn a bachelor’s degree in Spanish from Mundelein College.

Ronnie was missioned as an elementary teacher at Holy Name and St. Jerome in Chicago; Visitation in Des Moines, Iowa; Iowa City Catholic in Iowa City, Iowa; and St. Anne in East Moline, Ill. She also taught religion and social studies at The Immaculata and worked in the public relations office and the learning center at Mundelein College, both in Chicago.

While engaging in career assessment in the late 1970s, a dialogue with friends identified Ronnie’s listening skills and unique sensitivity to the sick, leading her to explore a new ministry. She completed her Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) internship at Mercy Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa in 1980, and proceeded to minister to the ill and their families for the next 36 years. She was chaplain at St. Joseph Hospital in Chicago and later at Northwest Community Hospital in Arlington Heights, Ill., where she also served as coordinator of The Compassionate Friends program that helped bereaved parents cope with the loss of a child.

A “normal” day as staff chaplain at NWCH included preparing worship and a reflection for an interfaith service on the weekend, counseling family members of newly diagnosed cancer patient, being present when a family identifies a loved one killed in an accident, celebrating new life with a new mother in the nursery after being present with another woman grieving a stillborn infant, offering prayers after the death of a patient and doing clerical tasks related to organ donation, autopsy request and death certificates.

Chaplaincies at Memorial Medical Center in Springfield, Ill; St. Elizabeth Hospital in Belleville, Ill.; and St. Mary's Health Center in St. Louis followed with the latter being her favorite mission.

In 2007, Sister Mary Frances Reis, BVM and two of her cousins became the legal guardians of two other cousins, octogenarian women who had never married and had lived together all their lives. This came about through Ronnie's intervention, preventing their assets from being taken over by a public administrator and allowing the women to move to a very nice care center. Two years later, when one of the cousins became seriously ill, Ronnie was present at the hospital giving affirmation and support for choosing hospice care. Mary Frances wrote, "For my caregiver cousins, it [was] an incredible sign of God's loving kindness; for me, it [was] another great example of BVM presence."

In 2011, the Clarke University President received an email from Mary Beth, a Clarke nursing graduate who was working as an ICU nurse for a Catholic network of hospitals in St. Louis. She wrote, "Yesterday I was taking care of the sickest patient I have ever taken care of in my career. . . As I was carefully explaining to the family what was happening to their very unstable mother, Sister Veronica walked in . . . I didn't know her, but I was glad she was there. . . I knew she could sense my emotions. She put her arm around me and simply said, 'You can do this, Mary Beth. You're doing great,' and gave me a squeeze. Immediately I thought of Veronica who wiped the face of Jesus as he carried his cross. What an appropriate name for her!"

Ronnie knew the value of companionship in times of suffering and appreciated the privilege of being present to one who is suffering. Speaking about her ministry, she shared, "It is important to remember that a family member never forgets the death of their loved one or what was said (or not said) in that experience. I consider each patient and family encounter sacred, intimate and personal. I am privileged to offer comfort, presence and prayer at a very personal time in the lives of those I serve."

Ronnie also was administrator and secretary for the National Catholic Vocation Council and was asked to serve on the National Certification Committee of College Chaplains. She was a member of the BVM Addictions Program Personnel since 1993. After moving to Dubuque, she volunteered to be a prayer partner with resident assistants and residence life staff at Clarke University. Throughout the year, partners connected for prayer and activities to get to know and support each other.

Ronnie wanted to be remembered for her deep love of God, her family, her BVM community and everyone she encountered. Imagine for a moment that St. Paul's letter to Philemon was written to Ronnie. "I always thank my God as I remember you [Ronnie] in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all God's holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. . . Your love has given me great joy and encouragement because you have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people." (Philemon 4, 5,7).

How great the joy and celebration in Heaven when Ronnie was reunited with her parents and siblings, with Mary Frances Clarke and our deceased BVM sisters, with those she profoundly touched through her ministry, and with the God she loved so deeply. Rest in love, good and faithful servant.