



Sharing of Memories of Eileen (James Leone) McGovern, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Jan. 14, 2026

Patty Pascal, Niece

Talking with my brother Tom [Roth], we thought of numerous memories of her celebrating holidays with us, driving in to get her when she could no longer drive, celebrating all of our life accomplishments, and then later, celebrating all of our children's accomplishments with us. We can appreciate now the deep impact she had on our lives. All our memories are bound together by love for her family. She was a constant presence and source of love and acceptance throughout all of life's ups and downs. Eileen listened to us without judgement and taught us through her actions to be kind and to love all people. To us, she embodied a quiet faith. She had a deep internal trust and reliance on God which was characterized by her inner stillness, her humility, diligent work and humble service. Eileen taught us to seek respite from the noisy world that we live in and find strength in life's present moments. She would always tell us to slow down and enjoy life. One year in my birthday card she simply wrote, "Patti, please take time to just be." Little did I know that these words would be so important to me now as they were then. As a tip of a hat to her Irish heritage, I would like to conclude with the "Irish Blessing" which she always had on a plaque in her room.

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine upon your face,
and rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

One morning when I was working at the Roberta Kuhn Center, I met a woman coming in for class. She took ahold of my hand, and with tears in her eyes, she said, "You have no idea what this place does for me." Eileen knew what the Roberta Kuhn Center would do for older adults. With her background in sociology and psychology, she knew that older adults need companionship and stimulation. While she was vice president of the congregation, she sponsored the beginning of the Roberta Kuhn Center. Today, 45 years later, that center continues to provide the warmth of companionship and stimulation. Today there are nearly 400 members that are part of the Roberta Kuhn Center.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

All of us in the chapel are aware of Eileen's many gifts and the many ministries in which she was involved. I would like to comment on two of these ministries that had a direct impact on my life. Namely, her work in Lincoln, Neb., where she served as a 7th and 8th grade teacher, and her service at Catholic Charities in Dubuque where she served our Hispanic brothers and sisters through her

counseling skills. Because I served as her letter writer, I had the privilege of receiving notes from her family and friends thanking and praising Eileen for her work and love of them.

I am recalling one letter from a former student in Lincoln, Neb. This person praised her for helping them to win the spelling bee in the area. That was not mentioned in all her great services through our community and the church. Don't forget those spelling bees! She helped the students in Lincoln, Neb., become number one!

Of course, I have to comment on her service at Catholic Charities to our Hispanic brothers and sisters. I served in Postville, Iowa, at the time Eileen was serving with the Dubuque Catholics Charities. She would drive around to the various Hispanic ministry sites and counsel people. I know personally how grateful our men, women and young children in Postville, Iowa, were for her wise council, support and evident love.

As her letter writer, I would also receive notes from family and other friends and maybe some pictures. In her final years, I would bring these things to Eileen. I would read them to her and show her the photos on my phone. She had that wonderful, beautiful smile while saying, "Oh, how wonderful! I love them all!" That will stay in my mind forever. So to all of you who wrote to her or sent photos, we say thank you.

Sister Mary Martens, BVM

I lived for several years with Eileen at the BVM house on Southern Avenue here in Dubuque. Eileen was the most peaceful and present sister I think I have ever encountered. She was just a wonderful part of community living. At the time, she had finished her term in leadership. She was just one of the crowd on Southern, taking her turn cooking supper, doing the things we tend to do as community people.

I so admired her ability with the Spanish language. It had always been a dream of mine to study Spanish. She encouraged me. I spent part of a sabbatical in Guatemala living with a Guatemalan family enjoying the ability to study. I never quite managed to become fluent. I am better at reading the language than speaking it. But I certainly had a fine model in Eileen. I knew the work she was doing in Dubuque with the Hispanic community.

Eileen was even tempered. I know she loved family. She and [her sister] Rose Marie were devoted to each other. Many Sunday afternoons we spent at Chris and Rose Marie's home here in Dubuque. I am grateful for her presence in my life.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

In 1961 when I was a postulant, my set witnessed the prayer service held here in the chapel when Eileen and Veronica Moore left for Bogotá, Colombia. I did not realize that she was the first BVM to leave for a foreign mission. Maybe forty or fifty years later, I learned that I was going on a foreign mission too. I talked with Eileen very briefly because she and her dear friend, Terese Jacobs, went to Ghana for six weeks. I remember hearing Eileen say, "The people were wonderful, but I could not take the heat." Growing up in Saint Louis with all the humidity, I was able to take the heat in Ghana for seven years. Thank you, dear Eileen.

Sister Marge Sheeley, PBVM

I first met Eileen at an archdiocesan gathering of Hispanics in Waterloo, Iowa. Immediately, our hearts connected. I was just coming back from working in Latin America in Bolivia. I just needed a touchstone with somebody else. She was that touchstone. As I worked back here, I don't know how many people I

referred to Eileen for counselling. When I started working with immigrants in a three-county area, I would go out to the small towns and meet the Hispanics. When I found people that I knew needed someone else, I would call Eileen and she would come out from her Catholic Charities position and be a counselor for them. So, Eileen and the many other faces I see here of women who have worked in Latin America, I am very grateful for the support we have had with each other for many years and continue to have. Thank you, Eileen, and thank you to all of you.

Sister Catherine Dunn, BVM

I was at Clarke at the time Eileen was there, and I know she was heralded as a tremendous teacher. Eileen was part of the disaster team with the Red Cross. The person who headed the Red Cross was dynamic. She made all kinds of inroads into the community. She was so impressed with Eileen's ability to speak fluent Spanish that she noted that to the federal government. So, Eileen a few times was called upon to go to national disasters. There were two reasons they wanted her. One, because she spoke the language so fluently and two, she was so dear with the people who were hurting.

Sister Kathleen Conway, BVM

My one contact with Eileen was when we came to a point in our congregation where our formation program was well set. Then we had news from Quito, Ecuador, that two women were interested in entering our congregation. The problem was what to do with them, how to get them into the congregation. So, three of us, Eileen, Barbara Gaul and I traveled to Quito to interview the two women. Eileen did the psycho-social assessment. I did the spiritual assessment, and Barbara did the community assessment. Both women passed. I remember Eileen being a gentle woman asking intimate things about their lives without being offensive. Today, Saskia is part of our congregation and Alegria is living her life and the values in a different way.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

I came to Dubuque a little over 10 years ago when Eileen was living on the first floor of Marian Hall South in the part of the hall that faced east. Anyone who loves plants knows that light is just perfect. This may seem frivolous, but I think it tells something about Eileen. She liked her door open. As I passed her room, I could see her feet if she was in her recliner. So, I stepped in to greet her. For many months, perhaps a couple of years, she was so proud and wanted to share what was an amazing plant on the windowsill. I had never seen it in my life. It was the dolphin plant with lovely, salmon-colored blossoms that looked like dolphins jumping. This was not a little plant. It stretched maybe three or four feet on either side of the pot. When it was in full bloom, it was stunning. Eileen just smiled, "Look how wonderful this is!" I was amazed. It showed me the delight she had in sharing beauty. She was always so even and quiet. I always appreciated her welcoming me in to share that beauty. Thank you, Eileen.

Sister Judy Callahan, BVM

I first knew Eileen socially when she occasionally came to visit [Sister] Mary McElmeel, in Kankakee, Ill., in the early 1990s. They had such a good time together and shared stories and past adventures together!

I knew her also professionally when we were both working in Hispanic ministry in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. She was an effective and compassionate counselor for recently arrived Hispanic immigrants, especially the undocumented. She travelled all over the archdiocese, responding to the needs. At that time, she was the only Spanish speaking counselor working at Catholic Charities. She and I continually advocated for more response to the burgeoning influx of undocumented immigrants in many parts in

the archdiocese. With continued urging the archdiocese eventually set up an Hispanic ministry in many parts of the archdiocese, but especially in Cedar Rapids and Dubuque.

Sister Carol Spiegel, BVM

Eileen was an enthusiastic advocate for the Roberta Kuhn Center. I still remember observing the board meeting when she stressed how this would benefit older adults in Dubuque. Later, when I joined Eileen and three other BVMs on Main Street and then Southern Avenue, Eileen's love of learning was evident. She certainly enriched our community living. I am grateful to have lived with Eileen for several years.

Sister Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM

After the message from Carol Spiegel, I am moved to say this. I too had the real honor of living with Eileen in Southern Avenue for several years. She really made our evening table conversations worthwhile. They were always substantial and they were always caring. One of my other memories of Eileen also includes her sister Rose Ann and brother-in-law, the Davidsavers. Eileen was a very hospitable person herself. But frequently on Sunday afternoons, Rosie and Christian would invite our whole household over to their home. Chris would open up his garage in all kinds of weather to barbecue and have a wonderful Sunday dinner for us. Those are among some of my favorite memories of community.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

Something no one has mentioned directly is that Eileen had a sense of humor. Here's what was in her file. The person who helped Eileen fill her file said that Eileen didn't think much of our Five Wishes document. This is what she submitted instead.

I, Eileen McGovern, being of sound mind and body, do not wish to be kept alive indefinitely by artificial means. If a reasonable amount of time passes and I fail to ask for at least one of the following, you will know that I will not get better.

A glass of wine, chocolate, a margarita, chocolate, martini, cold beer, chocolate, chicken fried steak, creamed gravy, chocolate, Mexican food, chocolate, French fries, chocolate, pizza, chocolate, ice cream and a cup of tea, chocolate, chocolate, chocolate.

When such determination is reached, I hereby instruct my appointed person and attending physicians to pull the plug, reel in the tubes, let the fat lady sing, and call it a day.

Mary Kehr Stucky , Former Student

Thank you so much for making it possible for me to participate online in the memorial Mass for Sister Eileen. I am so grateful for this opportunity. What a wonderful teacher and friend; I'm sure she is glad for her eternal reward. I had to chuckle when I heard someone mention the spelling bee! We were seventh graders and spelling bee champions!!! Humble beginnings for Eileen's life of love for others.