



Eulogy of Eileen (Patrick Ellen) Healy, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Feb. 13, 2026

Good morning. It is good for us to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Eileen Healy.

Eileen Patricia Healy was born Feb. 19, 1935, in San Francisco, the youngest child of Patrick and Mary (Scannell) Healy. Both of her parents were natives of County Cork, Ireland. She was preceded by siblings Nora, Daniel, Anne, and William who died in infancy.

Her father, who was involved in the fight against the British in the Irish War of Independence, emigrated from Ireland through Canada, where he worked as a shepherd, and then to San Francisco where he worked for the department of public works. Her mother Mary cleaned houses and later at St. Luke's hospital.

Eileen attended St Paul Catholic Schools in San Francisco. She lived close enough to run home for lunch, quickly eat, and then run back to play on the playground. Her favorite activity was jumping rope. "We had elaborate 'games' and 'rules.' We all knew them well. No grown-up had to get involved! Home and school were such a team that if you were in trouble at school, you did not go home and complain because you would be in bigger trouble there!"

Celebrating their Irish heritage was natural for the family. Her brother Danny was an Irish piper, and Eileen took Irish step dancing lessons and would practice her steps under her school desk while waiting for the next instruction from the teacher. Growing up, she sometimes got to attend social events at the Hibernia Club and the Knights of the Red Branch (KRB) hall with her two older sisters.

Eileen loved spending time with the BVM Sisters before and after school. "We waited by the downstairs door of the convent to carry Sister's books to school. We stayed after school to help. We knew that the sisters liked each other. We saw them laugh together. That was an important part of my vocation."

Eileen graduated from St. Paul High School in 1952. At just 17 years old, she answered the call to a religious vocation. Leaving family and California behind, she set out to begin life as a BVM. She entered the congregation on Sept. 18, 1952, and received the name Patrick Ellen on March 19, 1953. She professed first vows on March 29, 1955, and lived 73 years as a BVM. "I will always be grateful to my parents for their unending support as I lived my vocation. It could not have been easy to see their youngest daughter board a train in San Francisco for Dubuque." Her siblings, nieces, nephews, and cousins were also a wonderful source of supportive love.

Eileen's missions took her across the country. Her first mission was teaching seventh grade at St. Augustine in Memphis, Tenn. There was so much to learn culturally, even the colloquial speech of the students. The BVM Sisters teaching there were referred to as "the Black Sisters" because they taught Black students. Early in her first year, Eileen asked a student, "Where do you live?" His reply, "Siste', I don't live nowhere from here." She was stumped. A helpful student offered, "He means he lives close by." Being from San Francisco, it surprised her when students experienced segregation within the school system. Because they were a Black school, they could not compete in basketball or football games with White schools – public or Catholic – though they often brought home trophies when playing Black schools at the state level. When the Sisters discovered the Diocese was holding a teacher meeting to which they had not been invited, after principal Sr. James Orth contacted the Diocesan office, they were allowed to attend. A student from St. Augustine's,

Robert Smith, Jr., won an essay contest on “brotherhood” sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Because he was Black, he could not attend the ceremony at the Peabody Hotel with his family. Sr. James held a reception for him and his family at the school. All these experiences affected Eileen’s outlook on teaching and her sense of justice.

Next, she was missioned at St. Cecilia in Portland, Ore., where she taught fourth, fifth, and seventh grades over her eight years there. She also completed a bachelor’s degree in history with a minor in education from the University of Portland.

Her next mission took her back to the Midwest to teach seventh grade at St. Agatha in Chicago. Two years later, Eileen found herself in Seattle where she served as principal of St. John and Christ the King Elementary Schools. During this time, Eileen completed a master’s degree in elementary education with a minor in administration from Clarke College.

Eileen returned to her hometown in 1971. Over the next 23 years, she served as principal at St. Paul Elementary School and taught at St. Philip and St. Finn Bar Elementary Schools. While her mother Mary was living, Eileen visited her several days a week after school to share a pot of tea, some Irish bread with blackberry jam, and a visit with Freckles, Mary’s Irish Setter companion.

As a BVM, she was sometimes seen demonstrating a jig for the sisters, and her own skill at baking Irish Soda Bread and her mother’s fruitcake were well-known and appreciated. One year for my birthday, I chose a cranberry-cherry pie for dessert. Eileen said, “I’ve never made a pie before.” I told her about Pillsbury Pre-made Pie Crusts and “the rest is easy!”. It was a delicious pie, and she continued making pies for other occasions after that.

Eileen enjoyed riding her green Schwinn bicycle. On my blue Sears bike, we did several rides for charity together. The longest was a two-day, 150-mile ride through the Santa Clara Mountains. We both made it home with smiles on our faces.

In 1994, after a sabbatical at Notre Dame University in Indiana, Eileen moved back to Dubuque to serve as pastoral care minister at the Motherhouse. She shared, “I have considered [those] six [plus] years the happiest years of ministry in my life. I have grown through the experience of working with the Mount Carmel Community. I believe that I relate well to the sisters who live in retirement. Their well-being and happiness are very important to me.”

Eileen became the assistant administrator of the Motherhouse in 2001. During the Motherhouse renovations in 2007-2008, she served as director of relocation. She coordinated the moves of approximately 65 Motherhouse residents to temporary locations on campus and in the Dubuque area: to our sister convents at Presentation and Sinsinawa, and to St. Columbkille Parish Convent and the Julien Hotel Apartments. She commented, “I [was] impressed by the sisters’ wonderful attitude toward this . . . For the most part, they only wanted someone to listen to their concerns.”

Eileen also contributed her time, talents, and voice to social justice causes. She was active in is the Tri-State Coalition Against Human Trafficking in Dubuque and lent her voice to speaking out against the death penalty.

Eileen was blessed in her ministries, having learned so much from the children she taught, from other faculty members, from the sisters she walked with as a member of the Mount Carmel administrative team, and from volunteering. “Each situation had its own blessings and challenges. Each was the right place for me at the time . . . I did have a phrase for how I felt about the time at Mount Carmel—‘It fit my soul!’”

Eileen lived a full life as a BVM. She served as a member of the Senate and Assembly, and on Committees for Long Range Planning, Ministry Grants, and the Continuity and Coordination Committee. What impacted her most were the friendships she made along the way. She shared, “The most cherished experiences I have had are the faithful, wonderful friends I have made in the congregation. From the first day in the Postulate to the present, friends have filled my life with good times and challenges to growth.”

Being a member of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin meant everything to Eileen. "It is the fulfillment of a dream and a purpose. I have often thanked God for the 'wise choice of my ignorant youth.' I had no idea of the blessings which being a BVM would bestow on me when I walked up the front stairs of the Motherhouse so many years ago."

In Colossians, St. Paul instruct the faithful on living a Christian life. "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). Eileen was given this prayer which describes her life well: "O God, send me out today as one who is easy to live with like an old shoe, congenial to work with like an oiled hinge, and flexible to discuss with like an old friend. Keep me livable, congenial, and flexible the whole day. Amen."

As we bid farewell to Eileen for a little while, we are filled with joy knowing that she is enjoying a wonderful reunion with her parents, siblings, other deceased family members, and friends. "And until we meet again, / May God hold you in the palm of His hand," Eileen.