



**Eulogy of Edna Mae (Gretchen) Knudsen, BVM  
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Feb. 6, 2026**

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Edna Mae Knudsen.

Edna Mae was born on Jan. 18, 1937, to Jacob and Eva (Trenkamp) Knudsen. Jacob was born in Germany and worked as a shepherd before he immigrated to the United States and became a farmer. Eva was born in Preston, Iowa, but hailed from nearby Sugar Creek. They made their home together in Calamus, Iowa, where Edna was greeted by siblings Marie and Henry with Margaret, William, Lucille and Lillian completing the family.

Edna's small stature limited the farm chores she could do. She gathered the eggs and kept the milk separator clean. However, from the time she was ten, her primary chore was cooking. This included meal preparation for the hired hands during the harvest season.

Her father was a Lutheran who converted to Catholicism. The family attended a Catholic mission church where a monthly Mass was celebrated. The next closest church was in Lost Nation, Iowa, about 15 miles away. The children attended Calamus Consolidated Schools which unintentionally provided an ecumenical experience. Students from multiple faiths gathered at school on Monday morning and inevitably compared Sunday sermons and catechism classes.

Edna entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1954, following in the footsteps of her sister Marie who entered in 1952 and died in 2006 at the age of 73. Edna received the name Gretchen at her reception on March 19, 1955. After professing first vows on March 19, 1957, she was sent to the Scholasticate in Chicago where she earned a bachelor's degree in history from Mundelein College in 1959. She completed a master's degree as a reading specialist from Clarke College in 1973.

Edna grew up during World War II. In the aftermath, one of her relatives adopted war orphans. Their stories about the horrors of war had a profound impact on Edna, leading her to work with young children, especially those in need. From the start, Edna wanted to teach God's little ones to know and love God as God loves them.

Edna was a primary teacher for 26 of her 71 years as a BVM. She was missioned in Iowa at St. Patrick in Cedar Rapids and Our Lady of the Angels in Clinton followed by St. Anthony in Tigard, Ore.; Our Lady of Sorrows in Oahu, Hawaii; St. Matthew in Phoenix; and Christo Rey in Santa Fe, N.M. Edna spent two summers in Omaha, Neb., volunteering at the St. James Day Care, a safe place for children while their single, poor mothers earned GEDs or gained work experience. She also volunteered at the Crisis Center and Nursery while in Phoenix. Edna shared, "I've enjoyed working [everywhere, but] I feel my experience in Phoenix with Mexican Americans has helped me grow the most personally and spiritually. They are a great people, and I experience an acceptance by them that I had not experienced from other groups."

Edna's next mission was in Houston, Texas, at Casa de Esperanza, a crisis center that worked to prevent child abuse and neglect by giving temporary 24-hour shelter to children in crisis from birth to 6 years old. They were the victims of parents under stress due to emotional, financial or chemical dependency. Edna served as coordinator of the shelter and as a foster parent. She called them "my children, my little ones" and even made

blankets for them. Edna shared, "I love my work and feel that I'm giving new life and hope to the children and to their parents through our program."

For one year Edna worked as the director of The Samaritan Homes, a non-profit interfaith counseling center in Shreveport, La. The racism she observed there prompted her to lament, "Why don't people realize we are all just the same?" Sadly, a relevant question still today.

Edna moved to Saint Paul, Minn., in 1991. She worked as a teacher for Maplewood Child Care Nursery and as an assistant office manager at the Area Residential Care, a disability rights organization in Saint Paul. After retiring in 2006, Edna volunteered at a children's hospital holding ill babies who had no one or whose parents were absent due to work. She loved volunteering at the Minnesota Zoo in Apple Valley, Minn., for the opportunity to be close to animals.

"Ask the beasts and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among these does not know that the hand of the bountiful Lord has done this?" (Job 12:7-10)

Edna was the epitome of earth consciousness. Her spirituality was rooted in the beauty of the earth. Growing up on a farm, she knew all about animals and gardening and was more than willing to share her knowledge. Sister Nan Ross, BVM, planted a flower garden at Mount Carmel in 2009 and cared for it until her death in 2011. When Edna arrived at Mount Carmel in 2013, she undertook caring for Nan's Garden.

Edna's ministries were always people centered. She was generous, thoughtful, wise and could easily size up situations. She clearly, almost instinctively, knew what kindness she could do for others. She had a love of biology and an understanding of how the body works. Her illnesses and treatments increase that understanding as she made friends with the medical staff.

Edna had strong faith and gave her best in meeting life's challenges. She found assurance and encouragement in the many notes of affirmation she received and cherished.

- Think of all the wonderful things you have done with your life, all the people you have touched and made a difference in their lives. Think of the children you have helped and loved.
- You are a delight in my life – one of those precious people who teach the love of nature and the joy of living . . . [K]now how deeply you are loved and appreciated by so many.
- You are truly spirited, precious and unique. You notice the little things . . . the things that are real. You have learned the wisdom of . . . listening to all of life. Your attitude of gratitude reflects an openness to life and to the Source of all life. When you were 'life-d into being' God did it right

Our faith gives hope that Edna is in her "happy place," enjoying the fullness of nature's beauty surrounded by "the little ones" she loves so dearly. Well done, Edna, good and faithful servant, well done. arms of Jesus.