



Sharing of Memories of Mary Ellen (Davidette) Meckley, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, March 31, 2026

Mary Joyce Meckley, Sister

My name is Mary Joyce Meckley. Hello and thank you all for coming to Mass for Margie. You all know her as Mary Ellen, but at home she was Margie. She was born to Margaret and David Meckley in Waterloo, N.Y., on Feb. 19, 1936.

It didn't take her long to figure out what she wanted to do with her life. In fourth grade she was inspired by a nun who was her teacher, and that was it. When she graduated from Xavier High School, she wanted to go in with several other girls from her class. Our parents wanted her to stay and try a year of college, but she cried and cried and they finally agreed to let her go. They thought that she was so young and they wanted to hold onto her for just a little longer. Just the way we are all thinking and feeling right now.

She did go to Mount Carmel and just look at all she has done. All the aid and comfort, the support and forgiveness that she has given. All the love, joy, and prayers she has shared. Speaking up for those who had no voice. Caring and helping her whole life and touching so many in her own special way. My parents were so very proud of her!

She was petite in stature but mighty in every other way. Always busy with groups and committees. Working into the evening visiting and helping people. Never afraid to speak up even if in the minority. And God bless you if you were ever anywhere near her when she sneezed! It was sudden, loud and seemed impossible that it came out of a body so small (hee-hee.). That was Margie's little laugh hee-hee.

She loved her apartment and balcony with the view of the river. She loved her plants and the little birds that came to her feeders. She loved green bean casserole and mincemeat pie. She loved the chicken breast stuffed with spinach and feta at the Athena restaurant in Chicago. That is where she dearly loved St Agatha's Parish. She also dearly loved being a nun and prayed for all the souls of the world. I will miss being able to pick up the phone and hear her voice. I take comfort in knowing that she is in Heaven with Mommy, Daddy, all the rest of our families, and Jesus, of course.

I would especially like to thank Sister Monica Cahill, BVM who was her dear friend and mentor, and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary who are her family just like me. Someday we will all be together again in Heaven. My love and thanks to you, and God bless you all.

Ruby Taylor, Executive Director, Taproots, Inc, Chicago, Ill.

The staff and Board of Directors of Taproots, Inc. are saddened to hear of the passing of Sister Mary Ellen Meckley, BVM. For over 48 years, Sister Mary Ellen was a wonderful friend and supporter of Taproots.

Taproots was founded by Sister Monica Cahill, BVM in 1978 to serve those living in some of Chicago's poorest Westside communities. Sister Mary Ellen stood by Sister Monica's side and supported her and Taproots throughout the organization's early years and its growth.

In May 2000, Sister Monica retired and the organization voted in the current leadership. However, Sister Mary Ellen remained committed to supporting Taproots up until the time of her passing. She not only gave financially to Taproots, but she also gave her time as she continued to stay involved by supporting and attending many of Taproots' programs and events. Because she was so aware of and committed to Taproots' work, she encouraged us to submit applications for the Sisters of Charity, BVM Ministry Partnership grant and provided letters of reference to attest to our work and alignment with the vision and values of the Sisters of Charity, BVM. We have been sincerely grateful for the support awarded to Taproots by the Sisters of Charity, BVM Ministry Partnership Grant and Sister Mary Ellen's encouragement to apply.

In December 2024, Sister Mary Ellen invited us to come to Mount Carmel to share about Taproots' ongoing work in the community and how it all got started with Sister Monica. Once again, we received generous donations and financial blessings to support Taproots' work. In addition, Sister Mary Ellen made a generous personal donation to Taproots just this year.

I, personally, will miss Sister Mary Ellen so much and the phone conversations we shared. We spoke the day after her 90th birthday in February. She expressed how elated she was to turn 90 and how excited she was to be able to celebrate her special day with her BVM Sisters whom she loved so dearly.

Sister Mary Ellen loved people, loved community, loved serving others and she so loved her BVM family and community. But, above all, she loved and honored God and it showed through her caring and compassion for others. She kept in touch with some families that were a part of Taproots many, many years ago. Her life of sacrifice and selflessness has made a tremendous difference in the lives of so many others. She will forever remain dear in our hearts and her legacy of love will forever be cherished and remembered.

Humbly submitted on behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Taproots and on behalf of all in Chicago who were blessed to have Sister Mary Ellen in their lives.

Mary Valsa, Chicago, Ill.

I have known Sister Mary Ellen for 50 years. Sister Irene Lukefahr suggested that, since I knew Mary Ellen for 50 years, I should share a story no one else might know. It's a good story and I will tell you. My first job as a nurse was at the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute on the forensic unit which had felons from Cook County Jail. That was also Mary Ellen's first job as a social worker. One day when she was supervising a visit with one of the prisoners, I was there and in the room at the time. The prisoner pulled a sharpened metal shank out of his shoe, grabbed Sister Mary Ellen and demanded to be let in the locked elevator. Of course, the elevator was immediately unlocked. There went my friend into the elevator with a blade at her throat.

The one trait I admired about Mary Ellen was that she was fearless, brave and trusted completely in God. This man dragged her across the parking lot and into the parking lot of the University of Illinois, a few blocks away. There he let her go at the loading dock and tried to escape. He was captured and we went after Sister Mary Ellen and brought her back to safety at the hospital. I said to her, "Weren't you scared out of your wits to have a knife at your throat?" She said, "Mary, it wasn't a knife. It was a shank, a metal shank." I said, "Does it matter if it has a handle?" She said, "Well, God protects me." That's something that I pray for, especially now. That I may be as fearless as Mary Ellen and as trusting in God. God bless you, Mary Ellen.

Rose Malinowski, BVM Associate Discerner, Mount Carmel Bluffs Resident

(Note: Mary Ellen Meckley was part of Rose's Association discernment team.) I have known Sister Mary Ellen since the 1980s. We were social workers together in Chicago. I used to go to Mary Ellen's house for help, for comradeship and for plotting purposes. We would always try to help the people that we served. We worked in a neighborhood in Chicago where ambulances would not go. Mary Ellen always found a solution. I knew that if I called her, the help would be there. She was a feisty one, but she had a really good heart. We saw the feistiness here. I didn't know she was moving here. Then one day I'm walking down the hall and, "Oh, Mary Ellen! Hi!" She continued her feistiness until the end. Jan Supple had the privilege of being with her those final days.

Jan Supple, BVM Associate Discerner, Mount Carmel Bluffs Resident

(Note: Mary Ellen Meckley was part of Jan's Association discernment team.) I lived on fourth floor with Mary Ellen. I only knew her for a couple of years. She was the tiniest little person, but she had the biggest heart of anyone I have ever known. I told Sean that I had a lot of goods on her, but that I would be kind today. We know her as "the little nun on the run."

A week ago, I took her to Mercy Hospital. I found out I wasn't supposed to do that. She was supposed to contact other people first, but that's Mary Ellen. After five hours, she decided that she was dehydrated. She heard that word. I said, "That little cup you carry around is not enough water!"

She had three things she wanted to do after sitting in the hospital for five hours and waiting. I said, "OK, we can do this." She wanted to get her glasses adjusted which I could understand. I had to drop her off at HomeGoods in Dubuque. I said, "Mary Ellen, you cannot look left and you cannot look right. You need to go straight down and out the "out "door." That's where she got her glasses fixed. She did that. She then thought she needed sunglasses. They started at \$500! I thought she was going to fall off her chair! She got them down to \$200, but she said, "No, I need to think about that."

I gave her five minutes, but I know it was more like 20 minutes at HomeGoods. She loved to shop. She went to pay, but she didn't have her credit card. I thought, "Oh, no. Now we have to start looking for this credit card." She knew exactly where it was. She downsized before we went to the hospital. I just paid for what she got.

The next errand was going to the bank. She couldn't do it. She didn't have her credit card. "Oh, thank you, God!" The third errand was to go to Aldi's. She loved Aldi's. She didn't have her credit card. She said, "Forget that. I'll get that another time."

I love Mary Ellen. She was always in our hallway. We are going to miss her forever. She was our greeter. We worked at the puzzle endlessly and had a lot of help from Keith and many others. She loved visiting and we loved her. We will miss her.

Sister Patricia Tang, BVM

Marge and I were in high school together at Xavier in Phoenix. At our high school, there was a classmate Lorette Miller of the Miller High Life. Lorette, who lived in an exclusive Biltmore estate in Phoenix said, "Let's go down and teach catechism to the Hispanic children in South Phoenix." She was very kind and we did. We had the little kids sit on the floor and Margie and I taught catechism at a very young age.

The second memory I have was when we entered the BVM congregation. Six students from Xavier HS entered, but only two of us – Margie and me remained. Some of our classmates are here, including one who went to another religious order.

Sue Hattel, Member of Dubuque Area Congregations United (DACU) and Church Women United

I knew Mary Ellen very well. She was perky. She was passionate about making plastic mats for the homeless and unsheltered to lie and sleep on or place overhead since they are all waterproof. She worked on that project for several years. Taking plastic bags, she was either looping or standing at the big loom weaving which really makes the fingers tired. I just saw her a couple of weeks ago. She asked, "When are we going to be doing this again?" She might be coming from the Dubuque Food Panty where she volunteered in the morning. She always packed a delicious lunch and a beverage. She would work two or three hours making things for the unsheltered. It really is a labor of love when you use your hands to do this. These mats rolled up weighed about seven pounds each. They were shared throughout Iowa, or they were sent in barrels overseas where they were needed. She was highly active and dedicated to that and the community. Just recently she participated in a conversation at DACU about fraud and scams. She really was into everything to protect herself and others. Her smile and her twinkle! She was really a true friend and certainly a servant of the Lord.

Sister Catherine Dunn, BVM

Mary Ellen and I went to high school together at Xavier in Phoenix. She was a year behind me. When she got word that I was going to enter and found out my parents were not supportive and therefore my trunk needed to be put together to move to Dubuque, she jumped in and helped the sisters get me ready. I will never forget that the day before I left, she came to my door at home and brought me a beautiful two-piece suit and said, "I want you to look beautiful on your entrance day." That was Mary Ellen. She's been involved her whole life and has made a difference in the lives of so many people. Mary Ellen, now it is your time to rest and know how grateful all of us are for your life with us and for your service.

Sister Patricia Kerz, BVM

I have known Mary Ellen for 40-45 years. She was always around doing works of justice. Very dedicated to helping the poor. She was always interested in getting me blouses that looked good on me. The blouse I am wearing today was the last one she brought me.

I would get these phone calls from Mary Ellen. She loved meringue pie. She would say, "Pat there's a sale on meringue pies. If I get a pie, would you like half of it.?" I would say yes.

Often, she drove me to meetings. I must say she was a fast driver. It was kind of a scary experience! I prayed often when I was in the car as her passenger. We always got there sooner or later, usually later. She started late, so she was often late. If you call her at four, she might come by four-thirty. Mary Ellen was wonderful and dedicated to helping everybody.

Sister Carol Ann Spiegel, BVM

In 2006, Mary Ellen was living in a third-floor apartment on Taylor Street in Chicago. I think that partially explains how her energy and health have persisted. She carried everything up to that third floor and carried her laundry down to the ground floor and kept fit. I moved into the second-floor apartment right beneath her. She liked to tell everybody that she walked all over me!

I would like to share a story that was told by one of Mary Ellen's companions at the University Hospitals in Iowa City, Iowa.

When Mary Ellen was taken from the emergency room Sunday night to her room in the Intensive Care Unit, there was a nurse who was young, kind, and very compassionate. She had heard that Mary Ellen had worked for peace and justice. Early on the trip to the room, she asked Mary Ellen about her work. All through those dark, quiet halls, Mary Ellen told how she loved those days at Mundelein [College] when she worked with Upward Bound. Just think what a blessing that this young nurse was able to invite Mary Ellen to reflect on that period of her life that she so loved!

Geraldine "Jerry" Delaney, BVM Associate & Former BVM

I first met Mary Ellen at Presentation Parish on Chicago's west side in 1967, as a young professed BVM. We were learning about justice and racism issues working with Monsignor Jack Egan. As the years went on, her continuing justice work with BVM Monica Cahill on the west side in Taproots was a shining light. The last time I saw her was at my commitment ceremony when I became a BVM Associate before she moved to Dubuque. Whenever pictures were posted on Facebook of BVMs working for justice, I would immediately search for her smiling face, and I always would find it! She was a passionate force in the way she lived and shed her light in the world! Thank you Mary Ellen for your example!

Jim Vale, Friend

I am Mary Ellen's token Greek Orthodox friend. It was my great honor and distinct pleasure to know Mary Ellen. I met her shortly after we moved to Mount Carmel Bluffs. When I asked Pastor Laura Forster if there was a culinary committee to address dining issues here at Mount Carmel, she gave me Sister Mary Ellen's email address and suggested that I contact her to discuss dining here. I did so and got an immediate response from Sister, but not the one I expected. Her first words were that I was now on the committee. We ultimately met and before I could say two words, she stated that I would be the secretary. She was a great leader who stayed focused on the importance of eating healthily. Her emphasis on healthy eating was only interrupted on the second Friday of most months when she would ask me to bring a Gyro sandwich from my church. But in all fairness, she always said, "No tzatziki sauce."

She and my wife Mary Ann also shared many stories of their Italian heritage and spoke frequently of her time in Chicago where she served as a teacher and social worker in the West Side Neighborhood near where we grew up. Although Mary Ann is unable to be here with us today, she extends her fond farewell to her friend Mary Ellen as she is watching on closed circuit TV. Mary Ellen always referred to Mary Ann as her Pizon. (*Phonetic spelling of the Italian slang "paisan" or "friend."*)

Mary Ellen's volunteer work was legendary, as was her energy and devotion to helping those in need. In some ways, she reminded me of my mother who shared her February birthday. I thought about that when Sister Pat Nooney came to our door to inform us of Sister Mary Ellen's passing. What

immediately came to mind was what my German, Lutheran mother requested to be sung at her funeral – her favorite hymn “Abide with Me.” That great hymn clearly speaks to both my mother and Sister Mary Ellen.

Let me close by reading the last verse of that hymn.

*Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heav'n's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

I will close with a prayer from the Greek Orthodox funeral service.

Among the saints, give rest, O Lord, to the soul of your servant Mary Ellen, where there is no pain nor sorrow, nor suffering, but only life everlasting. We ask this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sister Marilyn Wilson, BVM

Just a year ago, Mary Ellen decided to join our committee Walking with the People of the Land. She was very energetic and supportive, but what was most important to our committee is that about a week and a half ago at one of our meetings, I was asking for volunteers to walk the land with a Native American person, which we had hope would happen. Of course, who was the first one to raise her hand as she did with a big gesture? She said, “I’ll walk. I have strong legs.” Because she chose natural burial, a couple of days before Bill walked the land, Mary Ellen joined the land. Our committee is so grateful to her. She is the spirit of the land that will stay with us and the native people always.

Sister Rose Mary Meyer, BVM

For years Mary Ellen and I attended the Interfaith service in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King. Sometimes she also joined the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights when we scheduled demonstrations in the downtown area of Chicago.

Sister Carol Atchity, BVM

In our set, we called Mary Ellen “Margie.” We were together for a short time after all these years, but she made such an impact on my life here at Mount Carmel Bluffs. Margie was a giving person. Because of her, I saw lots of Dubuque and Mexican restaurants. But it wasn’t just the places and the fun around town that she gave me. Margie gave me so much of herself in such generous ways. On her 90th Birthday she celebrated it by giving to a group of us a meal from Olive Garden with all the fixings that she brought here all by herself. It took a lot of energy to make her own cake with delicious icing too. I know Margie is running around Heaven giving as much as she can to others. She did everything quickly and she went into the arms of God quickly. You will be so missed, my friend, but your kindness and giving will always be a lesson and blessing for me. I will always love you and look forward to being with you again. Rest in peace, dear friend.

Elizabeth Becnel

I met Sister Mary through St. Agatha Church in Chicago. She truly had such a sweet spirit and soul. Thank you, family, for sharing her heart of love with our community! May Our Sweet and Loving Lord welcome Sister Mary to His table in His Kingdom!

Dianna (Castro) Stukes

My name is Dianna (Castro) Stukes. I graduated from St. Mary High School 1977. I did not know Sister Mary Ellen, but on a few occasions, I did have the opportunity to speak with her on the phone since we had a mutual friend Margaret Scott. She also graduated from St. Mary's High School in 1977. I am also remembering thoughts on this remarkable order of BVM Sisters. Reading Sister Mary Ellen's obituary, I can sense her extraordinary dedication to the education system and the mental health community. She surely had an impact as their family liaison with the Upward Bound program at Mundelein College in Chicago. Our friend Margaret Scott (aka Tubby) continued a long relationship with Sister Mary Ellen from that program. I am humbled to be able to share these thoughts. I am glad Sister Mary Ellen was a friend to Margaret Scott and to all that had a moment to experience her kindness, but more importantly her faith.

John Murphy

What a wonderful woman, dedicated to the poor and the most vulnerable of us. A blessing to have known her and her work!