



Eulogy of Sister Catherina Walsh, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Oct. 7, 2021

Rita Jane Walsh entered this world on Dec. 2, 1930, as the daughter of Arthur and Rita (Ryan) Walsh of Dubuque, Iowa. She joined older siblings James and Ellen with Mary Anne, Katherine and Michael completing the family.

Jane was an avid sports fan from an early age. She played in the Girls' Basketball Recreational League and was a member of the 1945 9th Grade Girls Championship Team. She continued to follow Iowa Girls High School Basketball for the rest of her life. Later, when she was a teacher, her students were impressed by how far she could hit a softball. Of course, her love for the Chicago Cubs and the Chicago Bears is well-known.

Jane attended Nativity ES and the Visitation Academy, both in Dubuque, and completed two years at Clarke University before answering the call to consecrated life. She entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1950, and received the name Mary Catherina upon her reception on March 19, 1951. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1953, and lived 71 years as a BVM.

After completing her student teaching experience at St. Patrick School in Dubuque, Iowa, Catherina was missioned as a primary teacher first at St. Dorothy and then at St. Dominic, both in Chicago. During this time, she completed a bachelor's degree in education and social studies from Clarke. Her next mission was as a primary teacher at Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Rapid City, S.D., which was followed by teaching junior high at St. Anthony in Casper, Wyo.

In 1967, Catherina was appointed superior/principal at Corpus Christi in Fort Dodge, Iowa. As an administrator, she maintained excellent relationships with the parents and the teachers. She gave the teachers a tremendous amount of freedom and trusted that they would always do their best. Catherina completed a master's degree in education and supervision from Loyola University-Chicago during her eight years at Corpus Christi.

In 1975, Catherina moved to Rock Island, Ill., where she taught junior high religion and social studies at Jordan Catholic for eleven years and served as vice-principal for twelve years. She used a wide variety of teaching methods, media and background material, to capture the attention of her students, to spark their interest, and foster respect for our country's history. One year during Catholic Schools Week, parents from Jordan Catholic had the opportunity to attend Catherina's classes. "She made history come alive!" wrote one parent. "We did not want to leave. We noticed that she had the same effect on her students."

Catherina did indeed have a wonderful rapport with her students. She was demanding enough to bring out their best, but flexible enough to allow for personal differences. Her interactions offered them encouragement, demonstrated interest in their lives, and promoted a sense of dignity and worth. She used her marvelous sense of humor to make her students smile every day. No wonder so many former students reconnected to express their appreciation.

Catherina was named the 1995 Outstanding Teacher of the Diocese of Peoria. The principal of Jordan commented, "Nobody is more deserving of this award than Sister Catherina . . . for all she's done, in and out of school. A lot of people don't realize all the time she puts in. She doesn't see it as a job, though. She sees it as her life. Probably

the most important thing—she’s just a nice person . . . She has such an easygoing personality. It makes her very easy to talk to.” A parent added, “Sister has taught our children the Catholic faith for many years, but more importantly, she set an example for our children, as well as the parents, to follow. Sister lives her faith. I have witnessed the kindness, caring, and devotion in Sister [Catherina] that Christ has asked all of us to practice in our daily lives.”

Catherina retired from teaching in 1998, but remained active by volunteering at Sacred Heart in Rock Island as a school volunteer and a parish visitor. She moved to Mount Carmel in 2009 and continued to volunteer wherever help was needed.

Catherina played a key role in keeping her Set of 1950 connected. She was very good at communicating news that affected her set—whether good or bad. When an opportunity arose to gather together, she was the one who put the plan into motion and made contact with every member. She was also the one who remembered all the details of their formation days. Listening to her stories was always an enjoyable experience.

Catherina enjoyed reading and traveling both in the United States and abroad, especially to Ireland. She loved trivia, American history and never missed the opportunity to talk about the history of her hometown Dubuque.

Catherina was outgoing and truly interested in everyone and everything. She was unfailingly kind, a good listener, and always good company. She was a faithful, devoted friend to Paulina Sullivan with whom she lived and ministered in Rock Island. They were the last two teaching sisters in Rock Island to leave Sacred Heart parish.

St. Paul encouraged the Philippians to focus on what is “honorable . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . [and] gracious.” (Philippians 4:8). This is how Catherina lived. She looked for the “excellence,” she sought that which was “worthy of praise.” In doing so, she touched the lives of countless students, families, colleagues, and surely her BVM sisters, probably more deeply than she ever realized.

At the time of her Golden Jubilee, Catherina wrote, “The years have gone by quickly but the memories live on—and there are many.” We recall and cherish our memories of Catherina as we celebrate her reunion with her parents, deceased siblings, Paulina, Mary Frances Clarke, and all her departed BVM sisters, relatives and friends. We rejoice that “the God of peace” who was with her in life has welcomed her home with a loving embrace.